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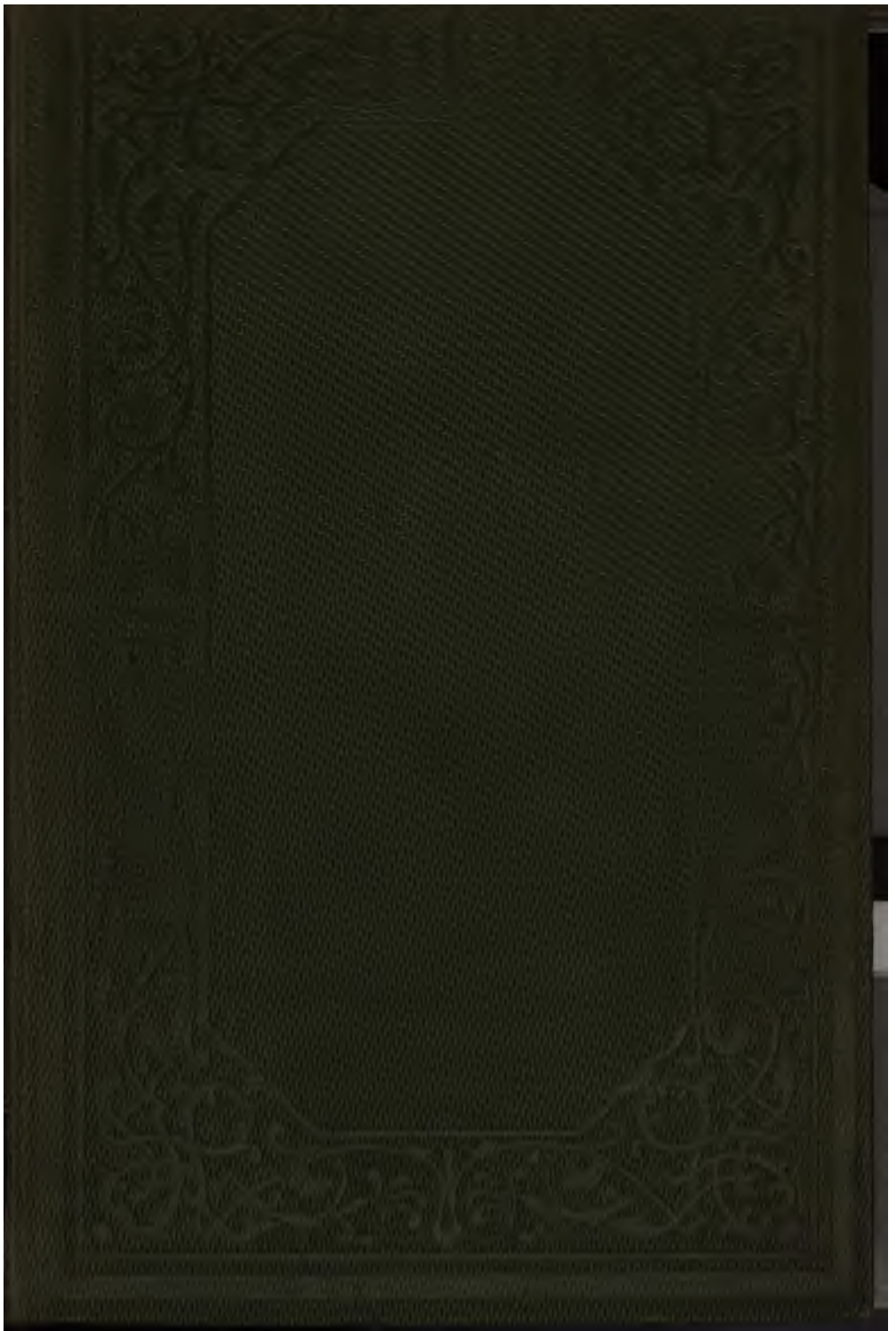
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THE
COMPULSORY MARRIAGE;
AND
ITS CONSEQUENCES.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1851.

249. W. 477.

LONDON :
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

THE COMPULSORY MARRIAGE,

• AND

ITS CONSEQUENCES.

CHAPTER I.

Two hours after the foregoing events, General de la Valerie sat in his *salon*, before a large blazing fire, which cast its reflection on his grim, thoughtful countenance, in the twilight. His valet entered.

“A letter for Monsieur le Général,” he said.

“Bring me lights,” answered his master, as he carelessly eyed the superscription.

The characters were tremulous, and at once revealed an aching heart and an agitated hand. Suddenly he started, and

before the servant had time to obey his commands, he tore open the envelope. There was no line—not a word—but at his feet fell an unsigned cheque for three thousand five hundred louis!

“Hah!” he exclaimed, his countenance, radiant with satisfaction; “Enfin! I knew it would come to this; but I guessed not so soon! that last letter did it!”

“Order my carriage immediately after dinner,” he said, as the servant entered.

When the man was gone, he rose, and going to his desk, which he unlocked, he took out a paper and examined it.

“Discharged!” he muttered to himself. “But she will not know how long it has been undated. Now, to remedy that;” and going to a table, he wrote the day of the month, the then present one. “But,” he continued, pausing; “if I give up this, what security have I?” His base mind reflected a moment: then Henriette, all truth and purity, arose before him. “Her word,” he concluded, “even though but tacitly given! Ma belle Henriette, à moi!” and re-seating himself, with a grim smile of satis-

faction, he placed the bond in an envelope, and sealed it.

Madame la Comtesse and her nieces, with Henri, were seated in the *salon* after dinner. La Comtesse was in an especially bad temper, because they had refused to accompany her to a *soirée* that evening.

"It is treating me as a cypher," she said; "no one considers me."

"Forgive them," said Henri; "I am not well, and they have stayed to keep me company."

"Pray go without us," said Paula.

"Allow me to please myself, Mademoiselle," she answered, haughtily.

"Do not be annoyed, pray," said Henriette, bending over her work, at a short distance. "I promise you, after to-night—just to-night—we will go anywhere you please."

"You have said so before," replied her aunt, pettishly. "I never met such ungrateful girls."

There was a pause, and Henriette's fingers passed the worsted through the frame; but the pattern was little thought

of. It was as disordered as her own thoughts. She was weaving sorrow with every thread.

Her brother and sister were talking together for the sake of avoiding more reproaches from their aunt, when Bastien opened the door, and announced the General.

Henriette bowed her head lower over her work, and her lips trembled.

He entered—calm and dignified as he ever was, merely bowing round as usual,—perhaps more distantly than he had of late done.

A hope sprang to that poor girl's heart. "Perhaps he had not received her letter : perhaps through some unseen channel help might come, and she be rescued ; perhaps ——." As her throbbing heart was framing these sanguine wishes, she felt, without seeing, that he drew near her. She durst not look up.

"Ever at work, Mademoiselle de Rouvray?" he said, with seeming indifference. "But it is pretty, and will reward your labour when it is completed : the reward of

labour, like that of a generous action, is sweet. Pardon me, I have thrown down your handkerchief from the frame : I am very awkward."

He stooped, and picking it up, offered it to her. Their eyes met as she received it. There was a letter within it. It was the warrant which was to consign her to misery.

"I thank you," she murmured ; and merely bowing, he turned away.

"How is this that you are all at home, dull and lonely?" he inquired ; "I called on a mere chance : I thought you were engaged this evening ?"

"So we were," began la Comtesse, and continued by enumerating all her wretchedness from the ill-treatment of her relatives.

"Do not be too severe ; I ask it as a favour," he said. "It is an amiable act to relinquish a ball, to sit with an invalid brother. You do not look well," he continued, addressing Henri.

"Neither am I," answered the other ; "and using the privilege of weariness, I will retire, if I may." He rose.

“ Oh, pray treat me en famille, sans cérémonie,” said the General, seating himself.

Henri moved to his sister’s side, and taking her round the neck, raised her face to his, and affectionately embraced her. There was a tear in her eye.

“ Away !” he said, smiling. “ There must be none of these ; you bid me hope, and you weep.”

“ It is gone, Henri,” she answered, brushing it away ; “ it is the last you shall see—hope, brother, for to-morrow—good night.”

He turned to Paula, she smiled on him. She was a stranger to some of the feelings that were busy in that *salon*. When her brother was gone, Paula at her aunt’s request, went to the piano. The General by degrees approached her sister’s chair.

Madame la Comtesse, like a prudent chaperon, (having been counselled by Amélie “ to give ce cher Monsieur le Général, a chance of making himself agreeable to Mademoiselle,”) rose, and seating herself by Paula, engaged her attention.

“Henriette,” whispered the General—it was the first time his lips had ever breathed her name to her—she shrank from it. “Henriette, I thank you ; do not accept it as a sacrifice, for a life of devotion on my part shall be your reward.”

She thought how short that life might be at his age, in which he promised her so much ; and how long hers would be, however brief his days, with his chains around her.

“All that true affection can offer, I lay at your feet ; every thought shall be for you, and those you love.”

“I thank you for that promise,” she returned.

“Now,” he continued : “how will you arrange this ?”

“I do not know.”

“I will tell you. Your brother must not know whence his relief has come—he would not accept it.”

“I know he would not,” she answered, promptly. (She well knew that with all his faults, he would die sooner than sacrifice her.)

“Can you not imitate your father’s writing?” he asked.

“I never tried; I do not think I could.”

“Then send me that letter—the bond I mean—to-morrow, and a line of your father’s; I will reply to it in the assumed hand, and direct it to Henri. I leave to you to contrive that he shall suspect nothing, and to exhort him not to be grateful in words, to his father for his supposed obligation to him. It may be urged, that Monsieur de Rouvray is unwilling the affair should be mentioned to him. You will do this?”

“I will,” she replied.

“And send some trusty messenger to me? not Amélie.”

Even that man despised his treacherous instrument.

“I have none, Monsieur. I would not have Manette—any one, indeed—know of this.”

“Can you not give me a line—just a line, of Monsieur le Baron’s writing, at once.”

She drew from her pocket his letter of that morning, and tearing off the signature, gave it with the letter, in her handkerchief.

"This will do," he said, carefully concealing it. "To-morrow morning your brother will be a man again. Is there anything more you would say to me?" He spoke in a gentle tone.

"Only this;" she whispered. "For awhile—a few days—lest he suspect—or they—or—in short—"

"You desire," he said, relieving her embarrassment, "that our engagement should be a secret?"

"I do;" and she raised her eyes, filled with her tears wrung from the heart, to his face.

"You shall be obeyed in all things. Now I will leave you. Thank you—and good night." He pressed her hand: she could not speak; the big tears heavily dropped their leaden weight of despair on her silken flower.

"Are you leaving us, General?" asked la Comtesse, as he rose.

"No, not until Mademoiselle Paula obliges us with that song again. I have been whispering to her sister, lest our loude

tones should mar such harmony." And he walked to the piano.

"I will try and not hate him," thought Henriette, "it will be my duty ; but if he really were a generous and a good man, why not have sent this bond anonymously to Henri, as he is doing now ; he is rich, and led him into the toils. He would have found a better reward in his approving conscience, than in a purchased wife, who can never love him."

The next day her brother was free. Frantic with joy, he rushed to his sisters, who, (one of them sincerely so) expressed the greatest surprise. Henriette disguised her deception as well as she possibly could.

"Yes," said Paula, looking at the address on the letter, "it is in papa's writing, slightly disguised ; but it is his. Oh, ce bon père."

"And you will not forget this, because of any seeming coldness or sternness on his part ?" said Henriette.

"No, never," he replied with energy.

"He would not seem to encourage you, Henri, but he has rescued you, and though

he may seem to deny it by his conduct, do not you attempt to divine his motives. Leave them unquestioned, and strive to gratify and obey him."

"I swear it to you, dearest sister. But tell me now; how did you know he was going to do this?"

"Do not ask me," she answered, looking down. She could not deliberately tell a series of untruths: she felt, in uttering the other, that her motive justified the deception; for its effect was not only to save her brother from the commission of some rash act, but that it would make him look with affection upon his father; so that her conscience acquitted her. But she could not invent falsehoods.

"Do not ask me, Henri," she said, "I must not, cannot tell—let it suffice that it is done."

The General came every day, and when soon afterwards he proposed again for Henriette to her aunt, and stated his hope of being accepted by Mademoiselle de Rouvray, it excited no suspicion in the mind of either the brother or sister. She had, in frequent

conversations with them during that period, spoken of disparity of years as being no obstacle to happiness in the marriage state, in her opinion, and she led the subject towards the General ; speaking of him as a man who might not be so harsh and worldly as she had at one time deemed him to be. She said much more to the same purport. Then, likewise, during those few days, her manners had changed towards him, and none from the first knew how much she had really despised him, so that, when she mentioned to Henri and Paula that she had accepted him, their grief was greater than their surprise.

“ I beseech you to pause !” cried Henri, taking both her hands in his ; “ you know but little of this man ” (he knew too much to make him desire such an alliance for his beloved sister). Think of his age, Henriette. Oh it would be worse than martyrdom !” he cried, almost in agony.

“ Dearest sister,” sobbed Paula, “ you cannot intend it ! What you ? only nineteen, and so beautiful ! Marry him ! It cannot be !”

“Is there no motive we do not know?” asked Henri, a vague suspicion in his mind of—what, he knew not.

“I will tell you,” she answered, evasively. “You, Paula, think me too young: alas! the troubles of my mother have made me thoughtful beyond my years. As to beauty, it soon fades. The General will be a protector; my father does not greatly love me: it is painful to say so—but it is true. I cannot return to des Ormes, as I am, with any hope of happiness.”

“But you will meet some one to love, dearest sister,” cried Paula.

“Vesey loves you!” urged Henri: “he will return, and—”

“No,” she replied, calmly; “Lord Vesey does not love me, and I do not love him more than the General.” (Of respect she said nothing.) “I am resolved to marry de la Valerie. I have pledged my word—he has written to ask my father’s consent!”

“I would sooner see you in your grave,” said her brother, gloomily; “you can never be happy with him.”

“Let me try,” she said, faintly smiling;

“do not discourage me, where I wish to be content. It is hardly kind ; for nothing can change my resolve.”

Her brother sat down in deep thought and wretchedness ; for now that all his better feelings had returned, his former love for his sister, if possible, increased.

The Comtesse was lost in amazement. She knew not of Henri’s debt of honour, believing that story to be—as Amélie had assured her it was—an invention ; none guessed the truth but that woman, and she, of course, maintained a discreet silence, and was, on the whole, not sorry for the success of the schemes in which she had taken part, and which had been most liberally remunerated.

La Comtesse, we have said, was lost in amazement. “Just like an English girl!” she exclaimed, “all sentiment and opposition. They pout; they’ll only marry for love, they’ll die sooner than do the contrary, and all the time they are concluding a *mariage de convenance*. Glad as I am, I certainly have no patience with such absurdity! And there, she looks as melancholy as if she’d been forced to become a sacrifice ! always sighing

and affecting perfect indifference to his wealth — and what else has she married him for? I really have no patience!”

All this was said to, and re-echoed by Amélie.

Madame de Rouvray was deeply grieved by the intelligence. Little as she had seen of the General, little as she cared for worldly things, the union appeared monstrous to her. She prayed, besought; recalled the story of her own first marriage to her daughter's serious attention, and with an energy of which few would have deemed that poor nervous woman capable. But she loved her child dearly, and in this marriage, saw the hand of fate punishing her for her fault. Manette was speechless at first with astonishment and horror. She knew how Henriette hated this man; she felt it was some sacrifice; she suspected all, but even to her entreaties, her child was silent.

“I am resolved, ma mère nourrice,” she said, laying her sorrowing head on her bosom; “do not discourage me; do not urge me. I shall be happy: no effort of mine shall be wanting: do not further dis-

hearten your poor child from a path she has willingly chosen."

To none did she reveal that secret spring of her heart which had its share in urging her to this marriage. She could not have married a young man, one to whom she would have felt bound to give love for love. This was a self-sacrifice ; and by the immensity of that sacrifice, she hoped to find peace of mind, and forgetfulness of that love towards Edgar, which no effort of her own could now banish from her heart or memory : he was ever before her, and as Paula's future husband, that living memory was a sin. In this fever of the mind and soul, she almost longed for the day when her marriage was to be accomplished, hoping by that sacred tie, to loose other bonds that clung around her heart.

The effect of this intelligence hastened a previously formed project in the mind of Madame de Rouvray. So mortal, or more than mortal, was her dread of seeing the accomplishment of this marriage, that she watched the opportunity and fled, whither the finger of the still absent Abbé de Bris-

sac had pointed,—to a convent. It would be vain attempting to describe the effect of this much dreaded event on the minds of her children, especially of Henriette. She saw at once all the consequences of this rash act. It would separate her parents, and by so doing, break her father's heart, who was even then, with the affection almost of a lover, preparing an agreeable surprise for his Marie. The loss to herself was irreparable. Who could render her the support even of that weak, trembling mother? And Paula? At that recollection her heart sank within her,—she had been so much occupied with Henri's bitter business, that for days she had scarcely seen her mother. It had been her intention to have endeavoured to rouse her to activity of mind, and a just appreciation of the Abbé's principles, by relating her too just fears concerning his sinful affection for Paula.

It was now too late. *She* married—who would guard, who watch over that dear sister? The blow was almost too much for her.

From la Comtesse she received no conso-

lation. "She thought it was an excellent thing, for in truth she was quite *folle*. Her brother must see the benefit it ultimately would be to his children, to have them removed from the influence of so weak a mother ; a mother who was constantly worrying and teasing them by her fancies, and preventing their advancement. She really wondered how Henriette, under such an influence, had ever acquired the excellent sense to form so sensible an engagement as the one she had contracted with the General." She uttered volumes more in the same strain. The children said little, save in warm defence of their mother, and of bitter regret at the course she had taken.

This step, however, removed a barrier of coldness between Henriette and the General ; for he, being on the point of an alliance with the family, felt most anxious to prevent scandal, which such an event would necessarily give rise to. But what she felt grateful for, as denoting a deep interest in their welfare, was mere selfishness on his part : he cared little, except

what arose from that feeling, whether Madame de Rouvray retired to a convent or remained in the world.

Being a Catholic, he used all his interest to procure her children's admission to her presence. He called on various dignitaries of the church, and obtained letters to the superior of the convent. But what could be done in this case? She might see her daughters if she pleased, but would not. She wrote a long letter to Henriette, and implored her, in all affection, not to seek her yet, till her mind became tranquil; and to this desire they were forced to submit themselves.

Madame la Comtesse wrote to her brother detailing everything after her own fashion, and regretting if it caused him pain, that Henriette should ever have taken her mother to the apartments of a low, and she had no doubt, designing woman, Madame Lagrange, where they constantly met the Abbé. Alas! that poor girl had ever to bear the burden of censure.

CHAPTER II.

THE General, immediately on his acceptance by Henriette, had written to solicit her hand from her father, and now awaited the reply in more nervous trepidation than any one might have expected from his calm exterior. He was, in truth, most deeply attached to her; all her scorn of him had not in the least changed his feelings towards her; rather the contrary; for an inward monitor told him how truly she detested the vices into which he had led her brother.

The three days following Madame de Rouvray's flight, passed away in wretchedness to Henri and his sisters. Even Henri felt it deeply. To Paula and her sister, the act of their mother almost brought despair.

La Comtesse in vain now endeavoured to lead them into society ; they were firmly resolved not to enter the world again, until their father had arrived, and by his persuasions, restored them, if possible, their mother.

On the third day after the letter had been written to the Baron de Rouvray, announcing this unfortunate occurrence, he arrived. He had deemed it best to consult with his sister before seeing his wretched wife, to whom he wrote a long, imploring letter, detailing all the misery her flight had occasioned him, and invoking her by her duty to her children, to return.

After an interview with la Comtesse, he descended to the *salon*, where sat his son and daughter, who were in ignorance of his arrival. When he entered, they all rose joyfully to meet him. Even Henri, who had reason to dread an interview with him, was glad of his presence and protection. Paula was in his arms in a moment.

“My child, my own child,” he said, pressing her to his bosom. On the others he scarcely looked.

“Father ;” cried Henriette—the appeal

was unanswered, and she shrank back to her seat.

Henri advanced frankly, and tendered his hand—it was rejected.

“We must have some explanation,” the Baron coldly said.

The other proudly retreated towards the mantel-piece, on which he leaned : even his new-born feelings for his father, engendered by his supposed generosity, were not sufficiently strong to make him overlook this reception. Henriette looked in sorrow on the Baron.

If care had changed *her* young face, what had it done for him? His countenance wore a blank look of mingled doubt and despair. He doubted whether even her affection for himself would induce Madame de Rouvray to return, after the violent step she had taken—and the dread of such a separation, had cast its foreshadowing despair over him. His figure was bent, and his eyes sunken and hollow : his daughters gazed upon him in deep affliction.

“Have either of you,” he said at last, releasing Paula from his arms, and placing

her in a chair, "Have either of you seen your mother?" The words seemed to choke him.

"No, papa," answered Paula; "she would not see us; we have tried in vain."

"And to whom," he continued, fixing his look on his elder daughter, "am I to attribute the influence which has driven her to such a step?"

"To no influence of ours," answered Henri, with difficulty mastering his indignation at the manner of this address. "We have watched over her—rather, I should say, my sisters have."

"And pray, by whom were the secret meetings with this Abbé effected?"

"There have been no secret meetings with our knowledge," said Henriette. "Once Manette told me of such a desire on my poor mother's part, and we exerted all our efforts to prevent it."

"Indeed!" and by whom, pray, was she taken to Madame Lagrange's?"

"That was all my fault," quickly answered Paula; "I was sitting for my miniature."

“Did you ask your mother to go?” he asked, in a softer tone.

“I did;” replied Henriette, before Paula could speak. “I did, papa, to cheer my mother’s melancholy by a walk every day in the Luxembourg. Without some inducement she would not have stirred out.”

“The Luxembourg,” he coldly answered, “is not Madame Lagrange’s. Why was she taken there?”

“My aunt,” said Paula, hastily, “would not let me go alone, and there was no one so fitting as Mamma.”

“Always like yourself, Paula,” he fondly replied, “screening the subtle and wicked doings of others beneath your own innocence. I know who took her there—it was you.” And he scowled on Henriette.

“Henriette could have had no bad motive,” answered her brother, with lips white from suppressed passion; at the same time placing an arm round her as she sat pale and trembling on her chair.

“Could she not?” exclaimed her father, violently. “And by whom was her money

and yours drawn out of my hands? Perhaps that was for some good purpose! I have too much reason to believe, from all I hear, that that money has been principally expended in this good cause, and given to this woman, Madame Lagrange!"

"Hold!" cried Henri, in a voice like thunder, and the boy stood erect, unfearing, and almost in defiance, before the man. Henriette sprang up and tried to arrest his words; he pushed her away gently, but resolutely.

"Hold, Sir!" he cried. "That money was obtained and given to me to save my honour, and your name. I had gambled and lost fifteen hundred louis; this noble girl, unknown to me—for I had only asked for my own—drew hers and rescued me! Come, Henriette"—and he tried to raise her from her seat—"let us go forth, even if we go beggars; let us go away from injustice, which takes the form of a father, to oppress us!"

"Stop, brother," she whispered, anxiously, "you forget!"

“Then why was I not told this?” said the Baron, a pang crossing his heart, as he felt he had been harsh and unjust.

“You would have blamed Henri so much,” cried Paula, soothingly: “even I did not know this, till now.”

There was a moment's silence.

“Perhaps,” he asked, as though seeking an excuse to be again angry, “you can give a good, disinterested, and womanly reason for your acceptance of a man older than your father? You have selected him, and I have no control over you, nor wish to have. You have chosen wisely, and in your worldly wisdom, marry him! Generally the young prefer the young! Much as I was grieved at Paula's choice, as one unworthy of her, still it was a natural one. Poor as Edgar is, he is young, deserving, and distinguished in his profession. He cannot boast, certainly, of one of the finest hôtels in the Faubourg; of wealth, the title of Marquis, and sixty years' experience!”

During this harangue, Paula hung down her head: she seemed in agony; pale, and

aghast, she sat like a criminal. Henriette clasped her hands in deep emotion, and looking upwards, said :—

“May heaven have pity on me, for I am in all things misjudged on earth! Father” (and moving quietly to where he stood with folded arms, she laid a hand on him, and looked up in his face) “try and think of my acts in christian charity; believe that some more worthy motive than rank or riches has made me accept General de la Valerie. For the permission to do so, I thank you as I ought, being your daughter—for such I am,”—she emphasised the words; “and perhaps some day you will acknowledge me as one!” She turned, while he stood conscience-stricken and speechless, and moved towards the door. He raised his hand to summon her back; his lips were parted for that purpose, when he met Henri’s eye fixed on him in stern condemnation. The mouth closed, and the hand fell passively to his side. His son, without uttering a word, passed on, and before the

door closed, his arm was round his sister, and they went out together.

In vain Henri again urged his sister not to marry the General, or at all events to tell him her motive for doing so ; she persisted in saying that it was her own wish, and so the preparations were hastened forward, for the General became hourly more anxious, like one who fears his prey may escape him.

Nothing would induce Madame de Rouvray to see any of her family, or even to answer a letter. There might be those about her anxious for her spiritual welfare, but all her afflicted family knew was, that she resisted every effort, even the prayers of her trusty Manette. This poor creature was in deep mental anguish ; her religion at variance with her sense of what was due from the wretched woman towards her family.

The Baron de Rouvray wrote, imploring Père Andriot to come to Paris, for in his character of an ecclesiastic, he could obtain an interview with her.

Three days after, le bon Père, in deep distress, arrived in Paris, and after a most affectionate meeting with his dear children went to the convent.

In vain the Baron inquired for, and sought everywhere the Abbé de Brissac. All he could learn of him was, that he had gone to Bordeaux, and was daily expected to return. Whatever Paula's feelings—whether of love or fear—towards this man, her agony was intense whenever his name was mentioned, coupled with threats and execrations, by her father, as the cause of all this misery.

When Père Andriot obtained permission to see Madame de Rouvray, he found her in a state of the most complete prostration. She had fled, driven to desperation by the denunciations of l'Abbé de Brissac, to whom she had confided all her griefs, with the desire she felt to seek comfort within the pale of his church. Alas! there was no consolation possible for her anywhere—thought, undying thought of her forsaken boy haunted her. She pictured him, out of re-

venge to her, brought up by his father with tyrannical cruelty, or else cast off, possibly a wanderer in want, or an adept in crime. Every fearful imagination haunted her.

To Père Andriot all was confided, and while his heart bled for her sufferings, he was forced by his religion, the religion she had now embraced, to condemn her to exile from her husband—her husband no longer. “But why,” he said, “desert your children? It is your duty to protect them; you are their mother, whether in sin or otherwise, and it is a heavy crime, thus to abandon them.”

“But,” she pleaded, “how can I see them and not him?”

“See him; it will be an act of Christian charity, for he suffers much; see him, and though you may quit his roof, sustain him, reason with, and lead him. Do not cast a shaken soul like his, on the wild waves of the world, without counsel or guide, or its sins will be accounted yours.”

“My life,” she said, “has been one of misery for years; one thought pursuing me

—my son ! Oh, it has been a heavy, though a merited punishment for my transgression. I cannot leave here ! here alone can I make atonement for my former life !”

“Life,” answered he, taking her hand, “is a struggle between the mortal and immortal—the spirit and the flesh ; the purest mind may be for awhile degraded by the instigations of the latter, but it will at last turn with loathing from that degradation. And there shall come a day when the spirit shall conquer, and winning back the erring flesh, purify it by penitence and prayer. Woman, it is not here you should strive for the mastery and make atonement. I, a priest, say to you, come forth to your duties on earth, and as the most sacred of those duties, watch over and guide those entrusted to your care from above, or their errors will be your sins. Come forth, and by good acts—not weak lamentations—seek heaven’s approval. Do battle with the ills of life, and you will rise triumphant at last ; not here in seclusion, only repent of the past. Come forth ! and, doing your earthly duty,

claim a heavenly reward! and then reckon the good fight fought and won!"

And the broken spirit arose, and went forth to take up its burden and strive once more! No entreaty, however, would induce her to renounce the faith she had chosen, or return to her husband. She met him, and they parted both nearly heart-broken.

"Leave me to my child, my Henriette," she said, "on her breast I have ever found consolation. I will not return to the convent; but leave me now to think and reflect!"

And as he turned away in sorrow, he met that child, and for the first time clasping her to his heart, he said:—

"I have been harsh, Henriette; a secret grief has made me so, but whenever again I turn in severity towards you, recall this day to me, and by your mother's love, will I bless you!"

She sank on her knees when he was gone, and felt that with a father's blessing to shield her in the conflict, her own heavy afflictions might be borne.

CHAPTER III.

THE Baron de Rouvray returned to des Ormes. It was deemed more advisable for him not to remain in Paris, where his presence seemed rather to agitate than soothe his unhappy wife. And with him the minister of peace, Père Andriot, returned to his *cure*.

It was arranged that Henriette's marriage should take place immediately, and her mother remove with her to the General's hôtel. It was the only consolation in the almost hopeless prospect before her, that that mother would be with her, and the hope of restoring her to her home, an incentive to

bear in resignation her hard fate. Still, as the time approached, her cheek grew paler, her figure slighter in its outline. Peace sat like a dove on her brow, for she had done her duty, and more ; but it was the sorrowing dove, seeking amidst dark waters, a resting-place for the sole of its foot !

La Comtesse and Amélie were plunged in a pile of satins and laces for the trousseau, and scarcely a day passed that some magnificent bijou did not find its way to the arm or brow of the General's fiancée ; but what were gems and laces, satins, and orange-flowers, to such a bride ? A mockery. A wreath of *immortelles* gathered for a tomb, had been more appropriate.

In all the arrangements she chose to make, or rather, which were made for her, the General did not attempt to interfere, save in one.

“Henriette,” he said, one day, “I have a request to make—indeed more, a desire I wish fulfilled, that you dismiss that woman Amélie from your service.”

She looked in his face, and read a confir-

mation of all her previous suspicions against that creature.

“It has been done,” she answered; “It was my first act when our marriage was announced; she remains, I believe, with my aunt; I have engaged another maid. Manette accompanies my mother——”

“Of course, she is faithful and worthy :” —and there the subject dropped.

Amélie was not a little amazed and enraged at her dismissal; fully imagining that the General would desire her services in attendance upon his young wife. She was not acute enough to see, that though a man may end by employing such tools, he seldom commences with them.

She however managed to bring about the dismissal of Fanchette, and succeeded her; but it little repaid all her scheming, to be tied to the service of a fidgetty old woman, instead of the position she had lost, of head maid to La Marquise de la Valerie.

The preparations for the wedding gave great agony to Henriette. The trousseau was laid out, and all the visitors came in

crowds to inspect it, to envy, and congratulate the unhappy girl. But time was moving on. She scarcely knew which was worst, the present pain, or the future sorrow. One was active—the other passive. It wanted three days of the nuptial one. It is a question which was most unhappy. As to Henri, his gloom knew no smile: he felt,—scarcely knowing why,—still he felt in some way that he had caused this marriage. His father's departure, and the painful events during his stay, had prevented anything like an explanation between him and Henriette. Paula heard frequently from Edgar, and this seemed but to make her more restless and uneasy. Not all her sister's entreaties could induce her to sit again for her miniature.

Madame de Rouvray had become calmer under the loving care of Henriette and her faithful servant. Her other children, though attentive, were as nothing in comparison with her. One day she sat in her mother's room reading to her. La Comtesse and Amélie had gone out as usual rather early, on some

mission connected with the splendour which in three days would dazzle all the Faubourg. Paula sat alone in the inner *salon* restless and worn with internal watching. She started—a quick step was heard crossing the outer room: it could not be Henri's, he had gone into the country for a day or two. Whose then? She stood up: presentiment had not deceived her; the Abbé de Brissac stood before her. Unannounced and agitated, he did not bow as a stranger, nor like a man uncertain of his welcome; he entered as one who had more than the ceremonies of the world to contend with; whose life was pending on the decision of a jury, where he, his own judge, had condemned himself. He came differently from what he had done before; he took her hand, and in a voice tremulous from emotion, said, "I have returned again, you see; but pray do not receive me thus standing; be seated, for I have much to speak of since our separation."

She silently seated herself; her large dark eyes fixed on him in terror. He

released her hand, and passed his over his brow, damp with more than mortal agony, for his soul was shaken in its faith and uprightness.

“I would speak to you,” he hurriedly said, as though he had but an hour to live, and a life to review in all its sufferings and deeds, “speak to you of one, who for nearly thirty years walked the earth without a self-reproach. Weakness came not near him ; he passed through fire, and its tongue did not even lick the hem of his garment—a self-elected, unerring man, stern, unpitying towards the faults of others. Charitable he was called, for he gave of his abundance, and remembered not the widow’s mite. Strong, self-confident, he walked as almost a God amongst an idolatrous crowd of worshippers. He dared all, for he deemed his house on a rock ; but there came a day when storms arose, and Heaven sent its winds forth, to punish the proud, merciless one. His house crumbled in the dust, and that man fell—fell ! Oh, in utter abasement, he fell by the passion he had

least dreamed of—by unholy love for a woman.”

Paula shrank back almost in horror from that fierce passion, but he held her hands strongly in his.

“Let me conclude,” he whispered, in deep emotion. “It was not without a struggle, a severe one, that he shut himself away from all, but there was a spirit ever breathing her name around him. Go where he would, there were evidences of her. One day the temptation was more than his unguarded, unsupported weakness could bear; he became for this thing perjured, and a thief;” and he laid before her her own miniature. She uttered a cry.

“Oh,” he continued, unnoticing it, “then all was forgotten. With this ever before him, how could he forget? How banish the dream of sin? All else was as nought. Vows, position, hopes of Heaven, all alike engulfed in that vision, which opened but one door to his view, and, with the conviction that his passion was shared in all its fatal intensity, he fled, and became an apostate to his

faith and priestly vows. Paula," he cried, in a wild agonising tone, dropping on his knees before her, "I am free—free from all but my worship of you ; save me, or I am lost !"

She burst into a wild, hysteric cry, and withdrawing her hands with a strong effort, covered her face and sobbed aloud. Before her eyes there stood but one vision, Edgar, pale, sad, and a forsaken sacrifice to this overwhelming passion.

"Mine !" he cried, encircling her in his arms, "mine, whatever the suffering I have suffered, whatever the agony I have endured, or may have to endure,—mine !"

She could only sob on the bosom which pillowed her aching head.

"Do not let me deceive you," he continued. "For my sake you will have to bear much ; there will be those to scoff and triumph over my weakness, over the fall of the infallible man ; but do not forget that that weakness to others, and to myself, has been strength to you ; that every vow I have broken has been a registered one of love for

you : think when I have to face the scorn of many, that on your bosom alone can I find repose or reward. Will you ?”

“ Yes,” she uttered scarcely audibly, “ I will.”

“ Oh,” she cried, with wild energy, starting from his arms, “not yet, oh not yet let this be known to mortal. Henriette, my poor sister !—this would kill her, for she esteems him much.”

It needed no name to indicate whom she meant.

“ What would you have me do ?” he asked, drawing her back to her seat, and clasping her hands.

“ Go,” she said, “go ; give me time to think and act, and let her sacrifice pass without this additional pang.”

“ You shall be obeyed. Secure in your love, what have I to care for ? In the new discovered world within me, I have no place for any thought but love of you, and, with that love, confidence. I go, Paula, and when all shall be again tranquil here, I will return, and openly avow our love. May the

blessing of our mutual ties of affection be found to guard us. Heaven bless you, my Paula—my own ! Your love is the key which has opened this gate to joy in my soul.”

He strained her to his breast ; but the pure cheek was untainted by the apostate’s lip. She felt *that* would have killed her, and shrank back. Another moment, and she was alone.

His visit was not mentioned, Bastien deeming it unnecessary, as Mademoiselle Paula was there.

Her painful anxiety and excitement were almost unobserved, even by her fond sister, in the preparations for her own sacrifice. As the day approached, the General grew more and more anxious. All was concealed as much as possible from Madame de Rouvray, who had almost forgotten that Henriette was going to be married, so great was her mental suffering. Henri returned from the country, where he had been some days.

The Baron de Rouvray would not be present at the marriage. An ample excuse was made for his absence, which was attri-

buted to a slight attack of illness. But what cared any one of the invited guests? they came to bow down to the future Marquise de la Valerie, to her wealth and position, in the prospect of what she would be, when throwing open the splendid salons of her hôtel as a leader of fashion, for that, of course, she would be.

“Ma chère nièce,” said her now most loving aunt, “I really think you were wrong in dismissing Amélie; though but a soubrette, it is astonishing the tact she has, and how useful she would have been to you in your future career in the world.”

“My career will not be very extended there,” answered her niece, “I shall receive only when I am forced to do so.”

“Gracious goodness!” exclaimed the other, starting in horror. “What do I hear? with the General’s colossal fortune, his position, your youth and beauty, you could not be guilty of so monstrous an absurdity!”

“Assuredly I shall,” she quietly answered.

“Then what did you marry him for?”

“To endeavour to make him a good wife, Madame.”

“Pshaw! nonsense! no one in their senses marries with such an intention. I beg you won't utter those dreadfully countryfied ideas, or nobody will suppose you to be my niece!”

“Oh, you know,” Henriette replied, faintly smiling, “I have lived so short a time under your good care, that no blame will attach to you!”

“Well, that's some comfort,” she said with satisfaction; “but surely, for your sister's sake you intend giving soirées.”

“Paula's engagement to Edgar renders it quite unnecessary she should seek further advantages in society. If I can afford her pleasure, I would sacrifice my own feelings to do it, but she seems quite as averse to parties, as I am myself.”

“That's true,” answered the other, “and I cannot understand it! I always return to my first idea; it is that dash of English blood in all of you, which makes a girl, the

moment she is engaged or married, grow so stupid. I am sure I never knew gaiety until I married *ce cher* Monsieur de Cressy ; but then I was very sensibly educated ! and *entre nous*, my dear niece, since you have shown yourself such an excellent girl in your choice of the General, you should endeavour to break off that foolish marriage with that Monsieur Andriot.”

“Heaven forbid !” she ejaculated with deep feeling, “that Paula should marry as I am doing ;” then correcting her too hasty expression, added, “I mean I should not like to see her relinquish her young hopes, and one so worthy and good as Edgar, for a mere worldly marriage !”

“And this,” she mentally said, “is my reward. I am suspected of a cold, calculating spirit, a mercenary, sordid heart, while all the gold in the world cannot buy me back that sweet dream of my youth gone in an hour—the vision of years ! like the tree we have planted and reared, watching its blossoming blasted by the storm of a night, uprooted and dead ! We left it in

its beauty to dream of those loving thoughts, sighed by its waving, leafy boughs, which sang them to us in the soft evening. We wake in the morrow's light—tree, and boughs, song, and dream—all, all, gone.”

“How very thoughtful you are,” exclaimed her aunt. I can guess what you are thinking of!”

Henriette looked enquiringly.

“You were thinking that your boudoir, instead of rose-colour and gold, would have suited your complexion better, had it been blue and silver. Well I thought so too, and so I told the General, who said if you didn't like it, it should be immediately altered! I never saw a more charming man.”

“You are quite wrong,” sighed she, thoroughly awakened from the waving of her green boughs of memory and youth.

“Then I have it,” exclaimed her aunt, dropping her voice to a whisper, “you were thinking that you would rather it were Milord Vesey! Well it might be more pleasing; but he is not so rich, and not a marquis, and then”—(and a comical look of awkward sig-

nificance overspread her face) “you know he didn’t propose !”

“Really,” continued her aunt, quite offended, “you English are the oddest girls in the world ! there is no comprehending you ! You refuse matches that French young ladies would be enraptured with ; or if you accept, it is unwillingly done, quite *en victime*—I really have no patience with you !”

And in proof of her words, she trotted out of the room, forgetful of her usually most stately air, to consult with and confide all to Amélie.

The morning before the wedding-day Henriette and Paula sat together by themselves at the former’s request. She had noticed within the last twenty-four hours so great a change in her sister, that she resolved to speak seriously to her before her marriage, which would separate them for awhile.

The only comfort she had, was in the belief that the abbé was still absent. She had never hinted to Paula her grave suspicions ; now, she resolved to clear them up.

“As she entered her sister’s room, that

sister met her with a look so wild, so terrified, that she began to imagine her reason affected.

“Paula, dearest Paula!” she exclaimed, embracing her, “tell me what is affecting you thus. You are changed in appearance, manner—in everything: what can have occurred?”

Paula slid from her arms like a guilty thing, into a chair.

“There is nothing, really nothing, Henriette. I shall be calmer soon. We have had much to try us lately.”

“Heaven knows we have! but you, my dear sister, should rejoice, secure as you are in the affection of Edgar.”

“Oh, do not speak of him, for pity’s sake,” she exclaimed, clasping her hands in prayer.

“Nay, but I must, I will, Paula; I have had such heavy thoughts at my heart about you and Edgar.”

“Oh! in mercy do not name him, I again beseech you!” cried Paula convulsively, and opening her desk, which lay

before her on the table, she took from it three or four unopened letters. "See," she continued wildly, "I cannot read them, still less ever see him again!"

"Merciful Heaven!" ejaculated the other with blanched lips; "then my worst fears are confirmed! Paula, my sister, my innocent sister, you love—"

"Stop!" she exclaimed in a piercing tone, standing erect like a spirit of terror, "Stop, do not name him! do not utter a name which I read in your horror stricken countenance; you cannot judge me as I do myself, nor condemn, as I execrate my own heart,—weak, faithless, guilty thing! but by all the love you have borne me, bear it still in memory, though you may despise me now—and for its sake do not pollute your lips with my shame by giving his name utterance!" She spoke wildly and hurriedly.

"My sister, my own sister," exclaimed the other with streaming eyes, as she clasped the struggling girl in her arms.

“Paula, you must be mad? ’tis guilt, ’tis sin, oh! too horrible to think of. Think of his vows, his position, all; reflect, and your better feelings must conquer. Oh! do not lay this heavy grief on me with what I have to undergo to-morrow.” In her agony, she forgot that Paula knew not her self-sacrifice. “You know not what my sufferings are; for their sake promise me to conquer, to wrestle with this dreadful passion; think of our young affections, our happy days of childhood, of Edgar, of your innocent love!”

“I have thought of all,” answered Paula, in a tone of deep despair, “and all is in vain!”

“But Paula, speak to your soul, your conscience, those will aid you; ’tis sacrilege—”

“You know not all, Henriette,” she said more calmly, “but you will soon; I am not the guilty thing in soul you imagine me. Rest content; whatever my fate may be, it shall not be a guilty one; sorrowful

it may prove, but no more. Now, sister, let us go to our mother together, and ask her blessing ; we need that."

Henriette could obtain no more ; and somewhat consoled by Paula's assurances, for she never once dreamt of the possible truth, she prepared to accompany her to their mother's room.

Stretching forth her hand, Paula took Edgar's letters with a look as if the very contact conveyed a pang to her heart. Henriette's eyes fell on them with a look which spoke the whole history of an age of love ; those neglected letters, so little prized, what would they have been to her ? —the solace of life. Even as she looked, her fixed gaze condensed space, and brought the scarcely legible characters clearly before her.

"Does Edgar already address you as Mademoiselle de Rouvray ?" she asked, and sighed over the moment, so soon approaching, when Paula would have that title by right.

"No," answered the other, turning

hastily to the superscription of the letters, "always to Mademoiselle Paula ; strange enough, here is one to Mademoiselle de Rouvray ; it has been given me by mistake ; it came a week since."

"Open it, Paula," asked her sister, with pale lips.

"No," answered she, tendering it with an averted look. "'Tis yours, Henriette, take it to your room, and read it there, but whatever it contains never speak of it to me ; in mercy (you cannot judge me yet) let all rest awhile, we will then speak of this."

With an anxious heart Henriette led the way to their mother's room, Edgar's letter in her hand. The others, unopened, had again been placed in Paula's desk.

Paula evinced a desire to remain with Madame de Rouvray ; she obviously shunned all further private conversation with her sister. Henriette shortly afterwards entered her own room, and closing the door took forth Edgar's letter—it was the first she had ever received from him. There

was ever a superior grace with the first of all things, from the firstborn, to the firstling of the flock, from first love to the first letter that told that love. Henriette sat down and opened hers. "Henriette," (it began) "Henriette, once my sister in all but the ceremony which should have made us so! I am writing to you still as one, even though a strange and kindling thought arises in my heart to repudiate that title. Since the last sad events have occurred, proving to me how much a young heart may deceive itself, I have narrowly scanned mine lest I should again err. I feel now, that Paula never loved me; I feel that I too was led away by an imaginary love; love her kindly I do—ever shall; still I feel, I do most solemnly aver, more dread at the thought of losing your friendship, than the certainty that she is no longer mine; and now I have sat down to ask you and myself in the same breath, 'have we not all, perhaps, mistaken our hearts?' I may not be enabled to convey to you my thoughts, but brought up as we all have

been together, an ultimate separation never entered my imagination, the idea was not tangible. When I have heard of ties for you, that would separate us, it has pained me ; you, Paula, and myself were as one ; now she has left us, and I can bear it, but I never could the thought of losing you. These doubts are too serious not to be deeply pondered upon, weighed in scales of virgin gold, with diamond weights, too pure and true to err. Many things cross my memory, and I dwell upon them : our early walks as children, and then that interview when you lay insensible before me, Henriette—have we all mistaken our hearts ? tell me, do tell me, all your thoughts ! I am sad, I feel so desolate : you have never written to me ; I never hear of you, far, far away. Henri wrote a few hurried lines a month since—then came Paula's letter ; from its tenor I felt she wished to break those bonds already severed in her heart before I left ; I felt it so that night, when after keenly noticing her altered manner towards me, she rejected my

flowers, and wore another's ! but by whom given ? there I am at fault. To my prayers she was deaf, to my solicitations silent ; and then when I wrote my last letter, a fortnight since, written calmly after mature deliberation, her silence has only left me a deep sense of how mad was our first dream, how wise has been the awakening. Pray write to me, Henriette, let me not feel how little I have ever reckoned in your heart, when numbering its ties of affection ; read, ponder over my letter, and find a little place in your heart for Edgar."

The letter dropped from her hand : what could it mean ? What had taken place between him and Paula ? had he severed their ties, and without more effort, more sorrow than apparently he had evinced ? had they mistaken their hearts ? or rather, had he ? her own she too well knew, only time could prove that. Time, and as she thought of that, the morrow rose before her mind's eye. And with the cold sweat of agony on her brow, she sprang from her chair, and stood with both hands buried in

her clustering hair, as her twin brother Henri was wont to stand, in his agony. "Mad dream," she whispered, "mad dream ! Time, there is none for me ! I have sold myself, I am bartered for gold, and if it were not so ? Edgar must love Paula, they will meet, they shall, and be happy yet ; his letter means nothing—it is from a soul in pain. She told me she would prove her innocence ; if she loved de Brissac, she could not do so. No, she may have been dazzled by that guilty man, but her pure heart will return to its first love when I am married." Here her heart stood still, the blood refused to flow on for awhile over that rock on which her bark of Hope must be dashed to wreck. A deep sigh sped on the current. "When I am married, Paula will be with me, Edgar shall come, I will re-unite them, and their happiness shall bring me peace." Here she stooped, and taking up his letter, read and re-read it, then rising slowly she approached the chimney, and held it over the flame. "No," she uttered, withdrawing it, "why should I destroy it, it is a brother's

letter," she paused. "A brother's letter, is it? he disclaims that title, and to-morrow I shall be a wife! none must ever see this letter, nor I again!" She looked round; all was still: she stooped her head, and the quivering lips touched the paper, the fingers relaxed, and the flame drew the sheet, sanctified by her pure kiss, to its embrace. She stood looking on sadly—the last word which met her eye was "Edgar," and all was ashes.

On this day Lord Vesey returned to Paris; his first thought was to call at Madame de Cressy's. He was about to quit his hôtel for that purpose, when he met a friend at the entrance.

"Just the person I have been seeking," cried the latter. "They told me you would arrive to-day; my carriage is here, come with me to Versailles."

"Not to-day," answered Vesey, "I have a call to make."

"Oh! you must defer that, I have got into a scrape with an officer at Versailles; you must come down with me, I expect a

message to-day, and you must stand my friend."

"Oh! in that case," answered the other, "I am yours," and, entering the carriage, they drove off. They passed their evening there, but no message came, and at night Vesey returned to Paris.

"It is too late to call," he mentally said, "at Madame de Cressy's, I'll go to-morrow."

And the morrow came, and with it his friend from Versailles, who found Vesey sitting over his breakfast.

"Is there some fête to-day?" asked the latter, after the other had satisfied him about the non-arrival of any hostile message after he had left, "for the streets have been lined all day with carriages, filled with ladies *en grande toilette*."

"Oh!" answered the visitor, "There is a magnificent marriage at *l'Assomption*, all the *ton* of Paris is there; the Marquis de la Valerie has married, this morning, there and at the Embassy, Henriette de Rouvray, Madame de Cressy's niece. By the way,

you know them, don't you? I forgot to tell you yesterday."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Vesey, starting up; "Oh, would to goodness you had told me yesterday! There must have been some strange motive for this. I am certain she disliked him. Oh! would to Heaven I had known of this before, I might then have persuaded her against it; so pure a creature married to such a man!" He paced the room in agitation.

"Did I not know you attached elsewhere," said his friend, smiling, "I should suspect your heart entangled."

"No, on my life! but she is one of the purest, best creatures I have ever met. I can scarcely account for the strong interest I take in that girl.

"Well," said the other, "if what De Brèges tells me be true, she is sincerely to be pitied; the old General enticed her weak brother to Frascati's, paid his creatures to rob him, and this girl has sold herself to pay the debt, and save her brother's name."

“Oh! if that be it,” exclaimed Vesey, in deep emotion, “she might yet be saved.

“But she is married, my dear fellow.”

“Such a marriage cannot hold good. Why did I not sooner know this?”

“We often hear things too late. De Brèges told me this just now, as I came here. But there’s no help now. Come, Vesey, tell your fellow to bring me some breakfast, I’m deuced hungry, coming from Versailles. I only wish I was at the wedding breakfast, I’d do honour to it!”

CHAPTER IV.

IF there is one thing more painful to read on the young face than deep, overwhelming grief, it is that disciplined resignation which tells so much disenchantment, so many severed links of life, once bright and glittering, grown rusted and dim by the tears of the soul. A face on which all goodness is met, like the page of some sacred volume, all save that trinity of virtues to make the momentarily checked blood again rush to its surface,

“ Faith, Hope, and Charity.”

Faith it had—faith in the sublimity of the sacrifice being accepted as atonement

for the faults of others. Charity, for all who had insisted on this sacrifice for selfish motives; but Hope—that sustaining pedestal amidst the bitterest sufferings—hope (we speak in a worldly sense) was blotted out.

Such a face was Henriette's as she stepped into the splendid equipage at Madame de Cressy's door, to pass her honeymoon at one of the General's seats near Fontainebleau. She was tearless, pale, and calm—she had accepted the self-sacrifice, and asked no sympathy. To the many congratulators she bowed with self-possession and dignity. When her brother came to take leave, she tore herself from the arms of that second self, and tried to smile. But when Paula's turn came, that young heart, powerless to control itself, burst into a wild, agonized cry. At that moment she did not feel her own coming solitude. All unselfish, then, she saw but Henriette, the young and beautiful, the cherished sister, who, light-hearted and joyous, had rambled whole years of infancy beside her. She saw her again as she had so often seen her, sitting on the

mossy bank at des Ormes, with her hair laden with wreaths of wild flowers, which they had gathered together! Waking from that dream, she looked on the cold, stern, young bride, and shrieked in her almost childish terror as she clung to her. Not even this moved her sister. Hope sheds tears—despair none. They bore Paula fainting to her room, and the carriage drove away amidst the shouts of a crowd outside the gates of the Hôtel de Cressy, bearing Henriette and the General de la Valérie, that man who had waded through so much to reach this haven of his hopes.

He looked from the carriage window as it drove off, and afar in the crowd, he saw a pale, well-remembered countenance, full of emotion and feeling—Lord Vesey's. A smile of triumph lit up his grim face as he beheld this imagined rival, and turning to his bride, he seized the hand she could not now withdraw,

* * * * *

We will leave them on their onward journey, and return to Lord Vesey. After

his friend left him he sat for some moments in the deepest thought; he had seen enough to be well aware how little even of respect Henriette had for the General, and the account of how he had won her made the man more repulsive in his eyes. "Oh!" he mentally exclaimed, "had I been here, she would perhaps have sought my aid in behalf of her brother, or I might have discovered it. At all events I could have saved her this fearful sacrifice, this dreadful fate. I know not why I love that girl so deeply, but she seems entwined around me like one I have known in a dream of boyhood, with a brother's love, poor girl! and I had hoped to have asked her, for my sake, to love another, who so much needs support and affection!"

After pondering some short time longer, a sudden impulse seized him: he would see her that very day, urge her to leave a man who had so basely purchased her, and endeavour by the laws to obtain a separation for her.

Alas! poor Vesey, his warm heart out-

ran reason, far outstripping it, but an uncontrollable impulse urged him, and in that state he hastened towards the Hôtel de Cressy. The General had seen aright, it was his pale, sad face he looked on in the crowd. Vesey arrived just as Henriette was entering the carriage! But one thing remained to be done—to follow; the thought was a mad one, but it emanated from a generous nature, which made him fully worthy of the sympathy Henriette felt for him. He rushed home to his hôtel, and mounting his horse, galloped off on the track of the General's carriage. On sped that carriage, and behind, at some short distance, came the panting horse and its rider. He had ridden hard to overtake them, without knowing himself what eventual plan to pursue.

At last the grounds of a large estate came to view: his heart told him it was there. He slackened his horse's speed to avoid being seen; the postboys cracked their whips, as they do in France when arriving at the term of their journey; the large iron gates

swung open, the carriage drove in. There were crowds round the entrance to welcome the happy couple. Vesey had drawn up close to the hedge, and, unseen, beheld that marble face, as it advanced to the carriage-window, and bowed in acknowledgment of the cries of "*Vive la belle Marquise!*" given out with stentorian lungs, by the assembled mass.

The crowds are gone, and only the note of a solitary robin is heard as it sings its evening song of melancholy on that cold wintry day in November. It draws nearer to a sad figure, which leans immoveable against a tree within the grounds, watching the lights in the windows of the château; and in the pale twilight it looks up in his face and seems to claim fellowship with that watcher in his cheerless plight. And that man knew not what to do, how to act: if he went up and solicited an interview at the château, it would compromise her, for whose deliverance all his thoughts were then occupied. See her he must, but how? He had rushed on, led by an irresistible

impulse, without considering the consequences to her, still less to himself. That homeless heart, which had never known the affection of father or mother, or any of the kindred ties of childhood, yearned towards this fair girl with almost paternal affection.

Suddenly Vesey starts; through a staircase window he sees a woman pass, bearing a taper; and, slowly following, is the object of his solicitude. There is sadness in the very undulation of her figure. He sprang across the grass, and rushed towards the house.

“Mademoiselle Mélanie,” said the butler, to Henriette’s maid a few moments afterwards, as he summoned her from the apartment of the Marquise, “there is a gentleman below who says he must speak a word with you.”

“With me?” she replied; “who can know me here?”

“I do not know; but as he says he has something important to communicate, I have shown him into the waiting-room.

“I will see him, then, but I must hasten,

for Madame is in her room, going to dress." So saying, she descended the stairs. She had never before seen Lord Vesey, and, on entering the room, dropped a respectful curtsy, inquiring in what way she could oblige him.

He was much agitated ; the day had been one of such excitement and trouble to him that he then was conscious of nothing but his determination to see Henriette. Briefly he told the astonished sou-brette that he had something of the utmost consequence to communicate alone to Madame la Marquise. " Arrange it," he said, " at once ; you need not announce me ; say some person from her family ; but let it be unknown to Monsieur de la Valerie ;" and, as he spoke, he placed a purse in her hand.

" I scarcely know how, Monsieur," she answered, curtseying at his generosity. Then, with that ready wit peculiar to French maids, she said enquiringly, " No one knows Monsieur, I suppose ?"

" Perhaps Monsieur de la Valerie's valet may."

“He is just now with Monsieur in his dressing-room ; follow me up the back staircase ; if we are met, I will say you are my cousin. Monsieur will pardon that liberty ? and then all are too busy and joyous to-day to question much.” Poor Vesey looked indeed a contradiction to this last allusion. “Come, Monsieur,” she continued, “I will take you to Madame’s *salon*, adjoining her room, and then tell her some one from her family wishes to speak with her.”

They gained the apartment unseen. Henriette was seated before the fire in her dressing-room, thinking of the one where she had so often sat with Paula, at des Ormes, when Mélanie entered, and, in a low tone, announced a visitor from her family. This quite confounded her. Was it Henri, and had Mélanie feared to tell her so ? Dreading some evil tidings, she flew to the *salon*, and, opening the door, found her hand warmly clasped by Lord Vesey.

“You here, my Lord,” she cried, shrinking back.

“Do not start from me thus,” he re-

plied ; again taking her hand, and drawing her towards a seat. "Do not wrong my motive by a false suspicion ; remember our last interview and interrupted conversation, let that dwell on your mind whilst listening to me now."

"Can I serve you ?" she said, looking up in his face calmly ; his words had reassured her.

"No, not now, Henriette. I cannot call you by his name—forgive me if I seem abrupt, but believe me only one motive prompts the course I am taking—sincere friendship. I know all. I returned to Paris last night ; and it was not until this very day, when your sacrifice was accomplished, that I had heard of it, and of the motives that induced you to take this ill-fated step. Oh ! would that I had been in Paris, I could have saved your brother, and, better still, yourself ; you would have allowed me, would you not ?"

She had struggled to seem calm during this speech ; his lip quivered as he spoke in the gushing fullness of his warm heart ; all her great sacrifice rose before her, a sacri-

face which had Vesey been there, might have never been accomplished. She felt she could have appealed to him, looking up in his face, her own struggled a moment to seem calm, but the effort was vain, for the first time that day, her heart yielded up what it had refused to Henri's grief, and Paula's anguish, and she wept bitterly; her small white hands convulsively pressed down the lids to subdue the torrent; but the storm of despair could not be subdued, and the tears gushed through the small fingers over cheek and bosom.

"Do not weep thus," he faltered, and his own eyes were dimmed, as he laid his hand on her arm. "Do not weep, I come to save you."

"Save me?" she cried, withdrawing her hands and gazing wildly in his face. "How? do you not know all—that I am married?"

"Yes," he answered, "but I also know, that with us no marriage contracted under such circumstances can hold good; the laws

would release you. Fly with me; I swear that to me you are as a dear sister; I will place you in three hours' time under your brother's care, he shall conduct you to England, there, if it be in the power of gold to do it, you shall be freed; by your mother's side you are English, and that will entitle you to the protection of our laws!"

"Alas! alas!" she uttered, again relapsing into tears, "your sanguine heart has led you into error; it cannot be, neither could I thus throw myself on the kindness of one who is not related to me. I scarcely know why I feel as I do towards you; I am indeed grateful, more so than words may express, but it cannot be."

"And would you, through false delicacy, sacrifice the happiness of a life? I am certain you might free yourself. Let me implore you to make the effort," and he grasped both her hands.

For a moment hope bade the thought dwell in her heart; then came another to force her from essaying to break her bonds.

Edgar,—the thought of him, of her love, her cherished love for him, made her resolve to bear all, sooner than expose her weakness to so severe a trial as his presence would be, herself, perhaps free, and he Paula's husband—for it never dwelt in her mind that they would ultimately separate. She knew not the heart of either, nor Paula's interview with de Brissac. Again, she had consented to her chains, she must wear them; even could the separation be obtained, her marriage be cancelled, she would not consent. Her mind was too much agitated for her memory to serve her well; or had she remembered Edgar's letter, and the strange questioning doubt in it, woman's love might have triumphed over all else, and made her, at all events, exert the means offered to free herself; especially now that Vesey's sympathy and urging had placed her position before her in all its horror.

Long did he continue to urge, but she grew calm and determined—he saw there was some other thought brooding in her

heart ; he could but try to comfort, and offer his sympathy and support, which she promised, at her need, as freely to call upon as it was freely offered. Before they parted, she learnt the history he had been prevented from relating, owing to his hasty departure from Paris. He had seen in Italy, the year before his meeting with Henriette, an English family of old descent, who prided themselves more on an unblemished name through a long line of ancestors, than on the empty merit of a mere title, unadorned by virtues. An only daughter formed the comfort of her dotting parents ; and it was for her health's sake they had visited the south. Between them and Vesey sprang up a close intimacy which, ere long, led to a warm attachment between this one loved child and himself, sanctioned by her parents and his father. To complete all necessary arrangements, they had all travelled together to England some months since. An interview took place between the Earl of Courtoun and her father ; the rest was a blank to Vesey ;

he found himself, for some reason, unrevealed by either her family or his father, forbidden the house, forbidden ever to think of that fair girl as his wife, who had been his constant companion for months. Her father wrote in all kindness to him, but the verdict was "they must forget each other." How easy to write or say this, but how impossible to command its execution! She was now near Paris with her parents; they had never since met, but she had written in reply to his prayer for a meeting,—her letter confirmed the sentence. "Her heart might break; she suffered for him, for herself, but never would disobey those she was bound to love and respect.

"I thought," he added, when the sad tale was told, "that you could have best advised me how to act. She might have met you too, in society. I scarcely know what I wished you to do, but I had confidence in your will to serve, even circumstanced as you are."

"Have you no clue to their motive?" she

asked, endeavouring to forget her own sorrow in his.

“None,” he replied, “neither from her father, nor my own.”

“Let us hope time may remove many cares. For all you have offered me to-day, I indeed owe you sympathy and affection ; neither shall ever be wanting ; and now, pray leave me ; believe that a motive, more than you can know, makes me resolved to seek forgetfulness in duty, even to the man who has won me by such base means.”

“Perhaps I may guess your meaning.”

“Oh ! if you do,” she cried in anguish, “And I fear such is the case, even to your own heart never breathe it, it is too painful, too overwhelming.”

As he pressed her hand, Mélanie opened the door.

“Monsieur le Marquis,” she said, “is asking for Madame.”

A shudder crept over her, visible to both ; the woman withdrew.

“Go” she cried, exerting every effort,

“ Pray go ; and believe this, I never shall forget this day, or the deep interest you have inspired me with ;” and, pressing his hand warmly, she entered her apartment. Shortly after Henriette had quitted him, he was cautiously conducted by Mélanie to the gate of the château.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after the marriage of Henriette, all Paris rang with the account of the Abbé de Brissac's apostacy to his priestly vows and religion. Of the many who had worshipped him, none remained to utter one kind word, one apology for the act. He had not alone deserted his faith above, but betrayed those who had trusted him on earth. There was a gloom over all, a general execration uttered or felt; and no one then knew the cause. In truth, he little merited sympathy or excuse: a man may at the eleventh hour see the error of

his faith, and in changing it for another look boldly upwards for support, *so it be conscientiously done* ; but here was one, an apostate to his opinions, all—for the love of a woman—he who had almost irreligiously uttered his doctrines against marriage, was praying for the moment to arrive when he might call Paula his at the altar. He thought not of faith, nor questioned the merits of either church. He knelt, and, lying before Heaven, abjured in its face the religion he still held in his heart. He renounced with his lips doctrines his soul had bowed before. He would have become a heathen in outward seeming, if, by that alone, he could have claimed Paula's love. And this was the strong man who carried desolation into a whole household to gain one proselyte more ! who sternly trampled all human feelings beneath his feet for religion's sake, and, defying temptation and affections, fell—fell—lower than the lowest idol-worshipper on earth ; he dared hold his head aloft, and lying to all, call his act one of

conviction. Paula lost to him, he would even then have grovelled in the dust, for re-admission to his Church, and the position he had renounced.

For days this occupied the minds of all. When a man like the Abbé makes himself the cynosure of all eyes and hearts, for his supposed virtue, and unbending sense of right ; as the tide turns, the waters rush outwards in turbulent waves, leaving nothing but sand and mud behind. Thus he stood ; but when, some days after the first desertion, came the second rumour, these waves returned in one loud roar, which threatened to overwhelm everything. There was no term too degrading, too contemptuous, to qualify his act. He stood before them, a naked leper, every plague-spot visible, degraded to that meanest thing, a liar !

The women were, perhaps, more violent than the men, for they felt something like envy of the girl who could bend that strong man to such acts. But she, poor girl ! far more merited their pity.

From the first she had felt his influence ; that tongue so eloquent, the eye so speaking, even in silence, had turned back all efforts on her part to burst from his chains. Even now she felt awe and fear, but her lip never smiled on him as it had done on Edgar, when her father had asked her at des Ormes, if she really loved him. Then her bright, unclouded eye looked on her lover, the rosy lip smiled forth the acknowledgment which angels might have approvingly registered. Now, she dared not think of her love, she shrank from it, and in a wild, feverish excitement vainly sought relief from reflection in any gaiety.

La Comtesse had never dreamt of so strange a possibility ; looking upon it in a worldly point of view, her delight was excessive. A triumph over all, for who might do what her niece had done ? De Brissac, now a man of rank, and all-sufficient fortune ; the match broken off with Edgar ; there lay her triumph over Monsieur Andriot. "She, a Protestant," she said, "could see no crime in the Abbé's abjuring his reli-

gion," quite losing sight of his broken vows to Heaven equally repulsive to every creed; and her mind was not sufficiently elevated to feel a disgust towards the weakness of the man. The world, she knew, would naturally blame, but that arose from envy; some few avoided her hôtel awhile, but others came, for there are few of the more worldly who will openly express their horror of the acts of a highly protected man. Madame de Rouvray was kept in profound ignorance of the affair, until the return of either Henriette or the Baron, both of whom were written to by La Comtesse, in terms of congratulation. She also wrote to Edgar, "to spare her niece the indelicacy of explaining her change of sentiments," rejoicing over the blow his pride would receive, the *bourgeois* who had dared to look up to a de Rouvray.

And yet this woman was not thoroughly bad or unfeeling, but her false pride towered over all. She was perfectly ignorant of the fact that Edgar had himself renounced Paula, (after being plainly convinced of her

estrangement) in one of those unopened letters, which she had not courage to peruse. We have seen by his letter to Henriette, that perhaps another feeling made the task easy; but what no one saw, none knew but his own heart, was the horror he felt on hearing of Henriette's marriage.

It would be difficult to define Henri's feelings. Since his sister's marriage he had become totally changed. He was no longer the wild, unthinking boy. As a drunken man sobered, he looked around, remembering all, but above all, the love and anxiety of that dear sister. He felt that now it was time to prove his affection by obeying her wishes, and after writing to inform his father of his purposed amendment, as a tribute to the succour he still imagined he had been receiving from him, he commenced studying for the church with a clergyman in Paris. On him Paula's broken faith fell heavily. He implored, besought, prayed to her, pointing out all its enormity. She had but tears to give him—excuse, none.

“I cannot desert you, Paula,” he said, with deep emotion. “I will see you, uphold you, poor, mistaken, wretched girl! but from this house I banish myself. I may come when you are alone; but if I were to meet that man I should forget what I owe to my name—a man who has brought ruin over all.

Paula could not reply; she sat pale and agitated. Finding all arguments vain, he rose to depart—before he could reach the door she flew into his arms.

“Henri,” she sobbed, “search in your heart for one thought of pity for me, I am wretched!” and she lifted her streaming eyes to his face. I cannot control my weak, almost sinful affections. I dread him more than I love. I could not live and renounce him, and yet his presence agonizes me! You cannot condemn me as I do myself. I dare not think, I dare not, cannot write to ——” she paused.

“To Edgar,” he said, concluding her sentence. “Edgar, that noble, generous, high-minded man, to be cast aside for this rep-

tile! I dare not stay now," he added, hastily disengaging her trembling form; "let me go, or I may not be master of myself should that villain chance to come."

He placed her on a chair. She still struggled to retain him near her, but freeing himself from her clasp, he quitted the room, and shortly afterwards the hôtel, little opposed by his aunt, whose vacillating mind had cooled greatly towards him, influenced by the insinuations of Amélie.

But of all who felt the blow, no, not even excepting Henriette and Edgar, the Baron de Rouvray was the most distressed. A thousand passions rose in his mind and heart against against this man, who having by his doctrines and stern commands, led his unfortunate wife to misery and seclusion, now had perverted the minds and feelings of his beloved, and, as he deemed, only child. His pride had at first struggled against her intended marriage with Edgar, but as he reflected on the noble qualities of the latter, he felt she had well chosen, and no longer desired, as at first, to break the marriage

off; but now, degraded, pointed at, sullied by the love of this impure apostate, he shuddered at her impending fate; his idol was indeed a mere thing of clay; and with these bitter thoughts in his heart, he came to Paris, and insisted upon seeing her without delay! No arms were opened to receive her, no word to cheer. He stood before her cold and stern. The first emotion past, she shrunk from his look, and covered her face with both hands.

His wrath against this once cherished object of his paternal love at length found vent. "I would gladly have slain you with my own hand," exclaimed he, in a hollow tone, "before this should have occurred. Oh! why is it, that where we most treasure up our love, we suffer most? Paula, if you will renounce this man, and return to me, my heart, my soul shall be opened to you. I will leave home, what is that home to me now?" (and his voice trembled) "yes, I will leave country, everything. We will go far hence, till years may wash this stain away, but do not desert yourself and Heaven for

this wretch." She wept; she knelt; and trailing herself to his knees, clasped them in agony, but speech she had none. He took her in his arms. "Paula, my child," he cried, and that proud man shed tears like rain over her, "think what you are doing, it is not alone here, you are lost, but as surely as there is a Heaven, such an act will be recorded against you there!"

"Father, father!" she cried, "have mercy on me—forgive me—I am weak, I cannot overcome this love if love it be; I would save myself, as I have struggled to do, but have not the force," and she shook, in proof of her words, with bitter emotion.

"Come!" he said, raising her in his arms, "come, I will save you, and in my bosom your heart will grow calm, my child, once more!"

He pressed her to his breast, and moved to the door. A step sounded without; it woke her though almost lifeless; shrieking she broke from his grasp, standing afar off with outstretched hands and streaming hair, like a statue of terror.

The door opened, and de Brissac entered. Her father stood for a moment powerless, the muscles of his face worked with emotion, but he could not utter a word. The other advanced—

“Back!” shouted the Baron, at length, like a denouncing spirit. “Back, fiend! to the hell which spat you forth; touch not this pure child, she is mine!”

Paula retreated from the arms he stretched towards her,—her wild gaze fixed on de Brissac.

“Am I awake?” exclaimed he calmly, though emotion spoke in his tone.

“Are you human?” asked the Baron, advancing towards him. “By your arts you have dealt ruin around you, and yet you dare look calmly on.”

“My arts,” he replied meekly, but loftily, “have been those of conscience and right.”

“Conscience,” laughed the Baron convulsively, “conscience, he calls it, to drive a woman from her husband, leaving her children motherless. Conscience! to draw this weak, loving, but pure child to his apostate

embrace. Double apostate! to opinions and priestly vows; but she at least shall be saved."

He strode towards Paula; de Brissac raised his arms, and the infatuated girl sprang to him for shelter. It was as a death-blow to her poor father; his sight was quenched, his head dropped on his breast, and one by one the burning tears oozed forth, as he compressed his eyelids to clear his vision. Paula saw not this; her head was hidden on de Brissac's bosom.

"Monsieur de Rouvray," he said, with deep emotion, "It were vain now to argue the merits of this deed. I have cast thought aside; the act has been one of fate! I have loved Paula, aye, from the first hour when her eyes looked on me. I fled her, tried all that man, mortal man may, to forget her. I will not defend my apostacy, but better, worthier that, than to live in sinful hopes, now they may be sanctified."

"And do you think," uttered the Baron, struggling to be calm, "do you think any

power on earth or any law of man can sanctify a breach of every vow? No, do not think it. I mourn over my lost child. I would have cast the earth myself, smiling, on her coffin, sooner than know this desecration. But it is past: she has chosen. I never will sanction it, and if she can marry you without that, her father's curse will rest upon her."

"Hush," whispered de Brissac to the trembling, sobbing girl. "Hush, Paula, there is no love so firmly rooted, as that planted in sorrow."

"And," continued her father, emphatically, "if laws can do it, I will tear her from you."

"To be a castaway," said de Brissac. "For I know by my own love what hers is in force and patience. Her head has not leant on this bosom without gaining strength from it. All mine she is, in soul and strength, sanctioned or condemned, by you or the whole world."

The Baron strode towards him and seized Paula's arm. She dared not turn and look

in his face ; she felt a horror of herself, and clung in agony to De Brissac.

“ ’Tis done !” said her father, in broken tones ; “ she has chosen, ’tis now for me to act. For you,” he cried, sternly, steadying his voice, “ if any law of honour binds you, if in your worldly career you bow to the world’s commands, this will bid you how to seek me,” and with his hand he struck him across the cheek. A heavy groan burst from de Brissac. Holding Paula with one arm, with the other he grasped the Baron’s hand as in a vice.

“ Man,” he cried, in a tone of deeply concentrated passion, “ you tax me too far ; there is the vigour of thirty unused years in this frame ; I could crush you as I would a fly, but you are her father. Look up, Paula, tell him what I suffered before my soul gave way ; tell him——”

A dead weight was on his arm—she had fainted. Releasing the Baron from his iron grasp he bore her to a couch, and

unheeding her father's presence, knelt beside it, suing to offend Heaven for mercy. He thought her dead. Her father cast one look of inexpressible bitterness and sorrow on them, and left the room without uttering a word.

CHAPTER VI.

DE BRISSAC was paralyzed ; in his conscience, he felt it would have been a just judgment were Paula a corpse before him ; for some moments he knelt motionless, the cold dew of agony on his forehead—he could not leave her to summon assistance. Slowly she revived ; with her first perceptible breath, a cry of delight burst from his breast, and clasping her there, he ventured, almost dared, to utter a prayer for her safety.

“Paula, my own,” he whispered, look upon me. We are alone ! No, thank Heaven, you are not taken from me. I

should have gone mad!" And at the bare thought his teeth set in anguish, his whole frame trembled. "They would drive this sweet breath from its abode for loving too well. Oh, my Paula! the arms are around you which will ever be your support and defence."

"Is my father gone?" she asked, wildly.

"Yes, we are alone, dearest, and safe and free."

"What was it he said?" she whispered.

"Oh, what avails that? We shall but the more love, severed from all."

"But he cursed me!" she cried, shuddering, "who can remove that?"

"Do not think of it. They were the hasty words of anger."

"And you, you!" she exclaimed more coherently, "I remember all now—he struck you in anger!" De Brissac crimsoned and then as quickly grew deadly pale; it was like a veil passing over glass; he was a brave man, and that blow had stricken his soul. "Do not speak of that, Paula," he whispered, scarcely articulately, "or the

world may hear. Only the immortal spirits know it now, and you, my own self. They will blot out many a sin for the rankling thorn in my soul planted there by that unavenged blow; he is your father, and you, Paula, will love me the more, for the suffering I endure in bearing the disgrace."

"But my father said much—much which I cannot now remember," she said, passing a hand across her brow. "Oh! it awakened pain in my heart; a deep agony. Tell me," she said, after a pause, and placing both hands on his shoulders as he still knelt before her. "Do you never reflect on what you have done? Do you not regret a good name lost?"

"No," he answered, rising, and sitting beside her, with both her hands in his, "I would make a thousand such sacrifice to be loved by you. I will tell you; the Abbé de Brissac, that cold, stern man, died, and his transmigrated soul came again into Melchior de Brissac, priest no more, to worship you! he left behind him his cold, monastic vows.

"Hush," she said, "do not speak thus

now, my father's voice is ringing in my ear in denunciation of our love. Oh! let me go to him, let me throw myself at his feet and crave his blessing and pardon;" she rose and tried to move away.

"Stop," he cried, clasping her again; "stop, Paula, I feel they will endeavour to part us; reflect,"—and his voice trembled, "but remember, you have more than a man's heart in your keeping, you have his soul—that soul which has risked itself for you,—remember the trust. Now go; and when all may plead against me, turn to your heart and judge me there—'tis there I would be sheltered and approved of."

He led her to the door, and turned back, oppressed by the reproaches of that conscience which he was powerless to silence.

But Paula did not again see her father; the Baron had in the meantime not been permitted an interview with his wife. No prayers could move her to meet him—in vain Manette pleaded; the affrighted woman shrank from him as from a leper.

He sought la Comtesse ; from her however, there was no comfort to be gained. She felt amazed at his want of interest in such a marriage as that between Paula and de Brissac.

“Bah !” she exclaimed, “What can his breach of vows be to us ? we are not Catholics ! And consider the *éclat* ! the difference of position, to what she would have been in as the wife of Monsieur Andriot ?”

“Consider,” he sternly said, “that one is an upright, honest man, the other—”

“Well, the other ?” she interrupted, “he is a man of rank—all we could desire. I declare I consider it the most romantic, *piquante* thing I ever heard of ! Surely you will not expose all your family affairs—for I know them all now—to the public eye by attempting to use violence to separate them. Depend upon it, they will be reunited, and in a manner to cast an undying slur on all of us.”

“Heaven help me,” cried the broken-hearted man, “for I am powerless to direct myself. All are gone ! all torn from me !”

“You certainly have been unfortunate, but that comes of marrying an English-woman : it was a dreadful affair !”

“May I ask by whom you have been informed of this ?”

“Nay, I must not tell that.”

Our readers will have little difficulty in guessing that her informant was Amélie.

“Was it Manette ? But no, I know she would not have divulged it.”

“I am not at liberty to say, but for all our sakes pray hush it up, and do not expose it to the world.”

“It is not exposure I fear or care for, but I dread something, if possible, worse. My child, my beloved child, how art thou fallen ! but 'tis over.” And he rose from his chair. “Tell Paula,” he added, “tell her, I leave her fate in her own hands ; to this marriage I never will consent ; and the day, if ever, that she marries that man, her father’s curse shall attend her.”

“But, brother Paul, you must be mad ! she cannot marry without your permission,

and it is dreadful to mar such a match for the sake of a foolish prejudice!"

"Foolish prejudice?" he said, sternly, "is it unjust prejudice against him, for all the ill he has done? My Marie lost for ever to me! And now Paula—all, all I loved! But I will forbear to work against him with earthly tools, knowing that a higher Power will punish such hypocrisy and evil. She has cast her father aside, even when I would have saved her,—so let her rush to her destruction. My spirit is too broken to struggle more!"

Without another word the lone, wretched man quitted the room, and, before another hour, had quitted Paris, on his journey to his desolate home and living grave.

"Really," said la Comtesse to Amélie, "I never saw such absurdity! Principles! Prejudices! Apostacy! I'm sick of these words! What have any of them to do with marriage? And such a marriage! If Monsieur de Brissac found himself wrong, in becoming a priest, he was perfectly

right to renounce the title. And Mademoiselle Paula I consider a most discreet and lucky person! By the way, Amélie, where did you say my nephew had gone?"

"Oh Madame, Monsieur Henri has taken apartments in the next street, and seldom calls here; generally before Madame is visible, merely to see Mademoiselle Paula, and endeavour to turn her against *ce cher* Monsieur de Brissac!"

"What dreadful ingratitude for all my kindness; but I never have been appreciated!"

"Ah, Madame!" sighed her cringing attendant.

"Well, I was wrong, Amélie; you are a good, grateful creature, and you shall not be forgotten."

CHAPTER. VII.

A LONG and dreary month had passed, and Henriette was again in Paris. Half prepared as she had been for Paula's love for de Brissac, the shock fell with leaden, icy weight on her heart. She had written and besought her to pause. She implored Henri, too, to use his influence with her father, with Edgar; all had been attempted, but in vain. To the latter she spoke comfort, and by so doing endeavoured to persuade her own heart, that he needed it for Paula's sake. But an inward thought would arise, telling her to remember that letter which he had written her, his last

communication, indeed, for since that moment he had not addressed a line to any of them, not even to Henri, who only had waited for Henriette's return to leave Paris, and seek an interview with him at Lyons, deeming it a duty of affection, to try and comfort the poor fellow in the affliction he fancied him plunged in on Paula's account.

Henriette was installed in the General's hôtel, and with her, her unhappy mother. As offering a last hope to save, she laid before her the baseness of the Abbé de Brissac's conduct. Even that failed. It was he, the poor deluded woman thought, who had opened her eyes to the consequences of a fault whose atonement she had accepted, and though the high priest might prove base, the temple still stood. No argument or prayer could change her will; she was, however, more resigned; the presence of her other two children removed seemed almost a relief to her,—it lightened her remorse.

We need not depict her sister's meeting with Paula, except to say that her efforts

to correct her infatuation were utterly useless. Paula was sad, at times irritable, but one unchangeable feeling seemed to guide her towards de Brissac, an infatuation which appeared to partake more of terror than love. She would sit silently gazing on him for minutes, and then turn almost with a shudder away. It was as the fascination of the snake towards its victim. Henriette never addressed him ; if they casually met she turned coldly aside, as from something noxious. This widened the breach between Paula and herself. As regards the General, on his return from Fontainebleau, he was a different, a happier man. Even whilst he saw Henriette's cold unimpassioned feelings towards himself, deeming it her nature, he became satisfied by the gentleness of her manner. Woe to the day he should suspect she loved, or might love another better. But in his heart existed an innate love of giving pain to others. He was all uncharitableness. This feeling induced him to seek Lord Vesey's acquaintance, and invite him cordially to his hôtel, imagining him a

rejected suitor of Henriette's, or rather one whose absence had enabled himself to secure her. It gratified his darker passions to see Vesey suffer, as he deemed he must do, though in the presence of the one lost to him for ever, whom he, the old and ill-favoured man, (he did himself justice) had gained. Of her dereliction from virtue he never dreamed : he knew her too well, he then thought.

The meeting between Henriette and Lord Vesey, was naturally a somewhat painful one. The General watched the effect with that gratification which only a mind like his could feel. All her self-possession was insufficient to prevent a blush over-spreading her face. Vesey was even more confused, and in his embarrassment called her "Mademoiselle de Rouvray," which made the scene most painful to both. The General did not quite like her heightened colour. For an instant the question arose, "can she have loved him?" which he answered by a "quand même; I know I can trust her now, but why have refused him? He is rich, oh, it cannot

be; she knows he loved her, and it is that, not affection, that makes her blush." How he mistook them both!

Some weeks passed over. In vain Henriette wrote to her father; Henri wrote too; the letters remained unanswered. Paula's were returned, the seal unbroken. Vainly too, did Henriette endeavour to reason with her mother, but it was guardedly done; she hoped by gentle means at length to reunite her to her wretched husband. Madame de Rouvray was calm and comforted by the religion she had embraced, and by the counsels of a better man than the Abbé de Brisac, who taught her to look to Heaven for pardon of her fault. But earthly ties were cast aside. There was no crime in her love for Henriette, so she cherished it, but Paula she avoided; being the favorite child of the Baron's it made her affection seem a sin. And Henri's presence too pained her deeply.

"He reminds me of another," she would often whisper to Manette, the ever true and faithful friend. She often sat in the morn-

ing in her daughter's quiet little *salon* with her, where not unfrequently Vesey dropped in, sometimes alone, sometimes with the General.

“One morning, two very different scenes were enacting in that *hôtel*.

The General sat in a small library adjoining his dressing-room, where he received morning visits of friends, or business after breakfast. Amélie was announced—his brow darkened: he despised that woman.

“You wish to see me?” he said, hastily, as she entered; “be brief, for I am occupied.”

“Oh! Monsieur le Général,” she replied, in a cringing tone, “I should not have presumed to wait upon you unsummoned, had I not been sent by *ma maîtresse*, la Comtesse.”

“Ah! you are living with la Comtesse, now?”

“Yes, Monsieur le Marquis. Ah! quelle bonne maîtresse!”

“Still I often regret,” she sighed, “that I did not please Madame la Marquise de la

Valerie, for I am older, and more staid than Madame Mélanie, and *la jeunesse* is often thoughtless ! A young wife is better served by a sedate maid."

"Madame la Marquise," he said, coldly, "is, I believe, perfectly satisfied with her attendant. I never interfere in such matters."

"Voilà," she cried, "how people do talk ! I was told that Monsieur le Général had insisted upon Madame's dismissing me. I thought it could not be, for I always served Monsieur so faithfully !"

"Well, well," he said impatiently ; "I did not omit rewarding you. But what is your errand here ? something more than this, I presume ?"

"Pardon, Monsieur le Marquis, for forgetting it so long a time ; Madame la Comtesse wished me to call upon you, as one in whom she places confidence, to ask Monsieur to exert his influence with Madame la Marquise, not to desert and neglect her as she does. *La pauvre Comtesse* is all feeling,

and suffers from the ingratitude of one she loves so much."

"But," answered he, "Madame de la Valerie called there yesterday."

"Yes, Monsieur le Général, true; but she came as a visitor; it was impossible to have any friendly confidential conversation, accompanied as Madame was."

"Accompanied? By whom?"

"Oh!" she cried, in seeming confusion; "perhaps I have been indiscreet! oh! ma foi! how sorry I am!"

"By whom?" he almost thundered.

"Mi-lord-Ve-sey," she uttered.

"Oh, true! she told me he met her as she was walking there, followed by her valet-de-pied."

"Oh! Monsieur knows *that*, then; I am most thankful! I'm sure, I would rather hide a fault, than betray it. But words escape us sometimes."

He looked fixedly at her beneath his brows: the accentuated "*that*" had lost nothing of the effect intended.

“Amélie,” he said, after a pause, “you think you know something. You are wrong ; a purer mind than Madame la Marquise’s never existed. “But,” he added, hastily, feeling he degraded Henriette by defending her to such a woman, what more have you to say ?”

“Eh bien, Monsieur le Général, Madame la Comtesse wished me first of all to implore your kind interference touching Madame la Marquise’s short and cold visits, and next on her haughty dislike of all counsel and advice, which I am sure Madame la tante means well. Cette chère dame feels it.”

“I cannot really see,” he impatiently answered, “wherein Madame de la Valerie needs advice, or deserves censure from her aunt.”

“Well, you see, Monsieur, Madame la Comtesse has passed through life with an irreproachable character, and cannot bear a slur to be cast on one of her nieces!”

“Gracious Heaven!” he cried, rising furiously, “who dares cast a slur on Madame la Marquise ?”

“Madame la Comtesse feels,” Amélie continued, in her subdued tone, “that after what she has heard, Milord Vesey is here, and elsewhere, too much domesticated with Madame.”

“These things were better said by la Comtesse herself,” said the General, pacing the room, angrily.

“I have told Monsieur le Général that ma bonne maîtresse places every confidence in me, and these discussions agitating her delicate nerves, she wished me to speak. Monsieur knows how discreet I can be.”

Their eyes met. A strange feeling crossed his mind. Had he, the practised deceiver, been himself deceived?

“Servants will talk. I’m sure I have most sincerely regretted from my heart”—(she heaved another sigh)—“that I did not accompany Madame de la Valerie on her wedding tour to Fontainebleau. Mademoiselle Mélanie is very young.”

The General grew pale as ashes, and fearfully calm, considering his previous emo-

tion. Seating himself, he motioned Amélie to a chair.

“Nearer,” he said, between his hissing teeth, as she chose one respectfully aloof. She drew near to the table where he sat, seemingly all humility and fear.—Amélie was a clever actress.

“Now,” he said, “tell me what you mean. I know you; you are not a woman to hint without a cause, and without proofs.”

“I scarcely know,” she said hesitatingly, “how to explain myself. I would do good; I would save *cette chère Marquise*, if only for Monsieur’s sake. And ——”

“Enough!” he cried, stamping. “Between us no deceit is requisite—tell me all you have heard, and I will pay you. Now go on.”

“Monsieur le Marquis knows, I am aware, of the constant visits of Lord Vesey here?”

“Perfectly; I sanction them—I brought him, in fact.”

“Yes, possibly, here. Monsieur also knows that Milord Vesey left Paris suddenly, before the marriage of Monsieur le

Général, without directly proposing for Mademoiselle de Rouvray?"

He started. "No, I was not aware of that."

"Yes, Monsieur, such was the case. He sent a bouquet and a note, bidding Mademoiselle think of him in his absence, and a similar one with ce petit chien Anglais, which contained no more than mere expressions of gallantry. Certainly he loved Mademoiselle, but ces Anglais are so cold and undecided; he left, without ever proposing."

"Proof of this," cried the General in a husky voice,

"La voilà, Monsieur," she said, laying before him Vesey's two notes, which she had found means to extract from Henriette's desk in the hurry of her marriage.

"Monsieur will there positively see, that Milord, though he loved, never had proposed to Mademoiselle; he merely alludes to some gallantries—probably in allusion to a rose Mademoiselle was working."

"I remember that evening well;" mused the General, in deep thought, "but is this all?"

“Hélas! non, Monsieur. I took care to sift all before speaking, and I have discovered that Milord returned to Paris only the day before Mademoiselle’s marriage, and was obliged to accompany a friend to Versailles, about an affair of honour, which prevented his calling. He knew nothing, from what I can glean, of the marriage till it took place that morning.”

“But I saw him in the crowd as we drove off,” muttered the General almost to himself.

“Yes, for his valet told me, when his friend told him who it was that had been married that morning, he thought his master would have fallen, for ce valet knew he was paying his attentions to Mademoiselle. It was he who brought the note and bouquet, and in England he took the little dog to Milord’s friend, to bring to Mademoiselle. So he watched his master’s behaviour, and when his friend was gone, Milord rushed out of the hôtel like a madman.”

“But these are his feelings, not hers”

said the General, catching at a straw of hope.

“I will continue,” resumed Amélie. “That night Milord did not return till daybreak, and he was worn and haggard with fatigue,”

“Eh bien ?” asked the General, fixing his burning eyes on hers.

“Milord Vesey followed Monsieur le Général’s carriage to Fontainebleau, and when Madame la Marquise went to her apartment to dress for dinner, she was absent nearly two hours. Is it not true ?”

“True,” he answered, without closing his fixed, glazed eye, “for I sent twice to request her presence *au salon*.”

“At that hour Milord Vesey was with her, introduced by Mélanie, whom he bribed, into a *salon* adjoining her room.”

The General rose with a groan ; it was like the roar of a wild beast in frenzy. There was a dead silence for some moments, broken only by his heavy tramp up and down that room. He tore the handkerchief he held into shreds, which he scattered

around him. Seating himself at last before the affrighted Amélie,—for fiend as she was, this passion scared her—he said, “Proofs—I must have proofs.”

“Go,” she said, trembling, “to Fontainebleau, to la Maison Royale, and ask whether on that day an English gentleman did not leave a horse there four hours—ask all—ask Mélanie if you will. She told me.”

“Does Madame la Comtesse know anything of this?” he inquired

“Non, Monsieur, nothing; Mélanie is too apt to speak again of what she hears—but she has heard from others about Milord, as if by accident, constantly meeting Madame la Marquise in her walks and visits.”

“Keep this from her then.”

“Monsieur knows he can rely on my discretion.”

“Do you know Mélanie?” he asked.

“Monsieur le Général, I knew her long before she entered Madame la Marquise’s service; she is one of my bonnes amies,” and she smiled. “And when I found I was to be

discharged, I thought I might as well do a friend a service. I bade her seek the place without, however, naming me, as *Made-moiselle* was so prejudiced against me."

"Then you are sure of her?" inquired the General.

"Certain, *Monsieur le Général*; *c'est une bonne fille.*"

"There then," he cried, and his voice was calm and firm, flinging a purse in her lap, "let me not appear in this; but serve me as you did before. I must know all,—all, remember: you can always seek me here,—my valet knows you, he is discreet. *Madame la Marquise*"—the name seemed to choke him—"must not know you come."

"I am sure it grieves me to the soul,—" she began, rising from her chair.

"Enough" he scornfully answered, pointing towards the door, "go; and let nothing now escape your vigilance."

She was gone, and her credulous victim was left alone with the hell of jealousy and suspicion flaming within his soul.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN Henriette's quiet little *salon* on this same morning, she sat with her mother, who was tranquilly knitting, whilst Lord Vesey read to them, out of a volume of Lamartine's poems. He was almost the only person Madame de Rouvray would meet ; but there was something so kind and gentle in his manner, that it would have been impossible for the most timid person to have shrunk from him. Besides, there was some strange feeling in her heart, some sympathetic link, still binding her to her own country, which made her rather seek, than avoid him.

Between Henriette and himself, little had passed on the subject of his visit to

Fontainebleau. He seemed pleased to witness her equal spirits, and the kindness of the General's manner. The marriage appeared likely to prove a more happy one than either had dared hope, on that sad day when he so vainly urged her to make an effort to sever the tie, so newly wrought. His greatest happiness was in Henriette's presence ; for his own dearer hopes were as far removed from a successful issue, as ever.

"I am sure you must be tired," said Henriette, looking up from some flowers she had been painting from nature, and which were in a glass which stood before her, "you are indeed, an indefatigable and delightful reader, Lord Vesey."

"I hope I have not tired you both," he replied, closing his book, and placing it on the table, "but I delight in this little volume ; it was given me by a dear college friend, which doubles the pleasure in perusing it.

"Oh no, indeed you have not, but we must not forget to be merciful : were I not, I should say, continue."

Her mother looked up and smiled faintly, but placidly upon him.

“ Well, then,” he said, drawing near the table where Henriette sat ; “ I shall come and talk, and criticize ; the last is a great pleasure, when you are perfectly ignorant of an art.”

“ Do you neither sketch nor paint ?”

“ Neither ; and yet I ought to do both, for in Germany most accomplishments are cultivated.”

“ Have you been brought up in Germany ?” asked Henriette, continuing her painting.

“ Yes, since quite a boy.”

Madame de Rouvray looked up wistfully in his face, as though she would fain have asked a question ; then a shade of despondency crossed her countenance, and she looked down at the slender fingers monotonously plying their knitting needles.

“ Germany is my home,” continued he ; “ I lost my mother at my birth, and have been an alien from England, almost from infancy. I think, fathers—both parents,

indeed—are wrong in sending their children away thus, for the supposed advantages of education ; it loosens all the gentler ties of youth, with its memories, making parents mere automatons, who pay and provide for your wants. It is with something like this feeling that I look on my father. I know less of him than of strangers.”

“What would your system of education be?” asked Henriette, smiling ; “a very severe one?”

“No, quite the contrary; we learn, as children, more from love than fear. I speak in a general sense. I would operate on a child’s feelings; good, wholesome tuition, not too much at once; amusement, exercise, —*that* above all. Nothing brightens the intellect more than fresh air; Boreas is the child’s best friend. All this should be done under the teaching, and under the watchful eye of a patient, well-tempered person. These rules apply to either sex.”

“But there exists a prejudice in favour of German universities for youths.”

“It is a mistake, generally speaking.

Give children masters at home ; why should we neglect our mother tongue for a foreign one ? Many perfect German and French scholars cannot write three lines of good English, or even spell correctly. No, let them learn accomplishments at home, under foreign masters ; above all, let them learn to love home and its associations, and after that, send them abroad to study practically what they have learnt theoretically. " I speak of home," he continued, in a sad tone, " as I can imagine it ; I never had one !"

Henriette looked up with a feeling of pity, there was such a sense of loneliness conveyed in his tone. A silence of some moments ensued.

" I have scarcely an English acquaintance," he continued more gaily ; " My formal friend is almost my only one ; you remember the person who brought Gem over ?"

" Yes, I remember," she rejoined, bending over her flowers ; " I wondered at your selecting for an intimate friend, one, who in manner seemed so little sympathetic with

yourself. He was very ungenial during our short interview."

"But an excellent, good creature. What a pretty group of flowers you are painting," he added, changing his tone; "have you completed the white moss rose?"

"Yes, quite," and she held her sketch towards him.

"Then I want you to give me the original. Will you? I have a motive."

"May I ask it? I am a true woman in curiosity!"

"A boy's reason, though from a man. This is my birth-day; no one has *fêté* me yet. I covet that rose. Allow me," he added, stooping, and picking up Madame de Rouvray's large ball of knitting-cotton, which rolled to his feet. "Gem is no respecter of ladies' work; he has already appropriated to himself yours, as a play-thing."

He lifted the ball from the ground as he spoke, and placed it in Madame de Rouvray's hand, which was cold and trembling.

"Are you not well?" he asked, kindly.

Henriette turned anxiously towards her mother, who made an effort to subdue her emotion, and said, "Yes—oh yes; 'twas a spasm here—'tis gone," and she laid her hand on her heart.

"Maman, dear, would you like to go up stairs? shall I call Manette? Will you lie down?" And her child fondly put her arms round her.

"No, no," she answered, hurriedly; "I would rather remain. Sit down, Henriette; I am better now—much better." She looked fixedly in Lord Vesey's face for a moment, and then, as if some indescribably intense emotion seized her, she said,—

"When you were in Germany, my Lord, at school, did you know a Mr. ——"

The name could not find utterance. Henriette was in terror; she knew of whom her mother would speak.

"Mr. ——?" he asked.

"No; never mind," she replied. "You did not know him, I am afraid; he would have been just your age, but he is dead, I am sure."

The words came slowly forth, and her head dropped despondingly on her breast.

Henriette gave Vesey a look which pleaded for silence. He felt what was meant, and that look seemed a bond of communion between them. He changed the subject by again turning to the table.

“May I have the rose?” he asked.

She took it from the glass, and gave it him.

“What a terrible thing it is to be so soon forgotten,” he said laughing, not knowing he was again leading towards the forbidden subject. “Last year—this day last year—I came of age, and was obliged to leave my German home, most unwillingly, to return to my father, and a huge, uncomfortable castle in Westmoreland, which became his, with the title, by the very sudden demise of a distant relation. And there, without a smile of welcome to cheer me (for my father and I were almost strangers), and out of mere ceremony’s sake, I had to superintend the eating of sundry fatted beeves in honour of my majority.”

Henriette heard a suppressed sob behind them ; Vesey was turning towards her mother, when she gently laid a hand on his arm. She was understood, though he could not comprehend the scene.

“ Ah !” he cried, rising hastily, “ there is Monsieur le Général come to join us.”

She had withdrawn her hand at the first exclamation, but not before her husband had seen it, for the noiseless door had admitted him as she placed it there. She removed it without embarrassment. What had she to blush for ?

“ Good day, Vesey,” said the General, advancing with a smile ; “ always occupied in the service of the ladies ?” He placed a hand on Henriette’s shoulder as he spoke. “ Ah, my little wife,” and he looked in her face, “ painting ? I like to see a woman employed : it shows a pure mind, a conscience free ! Is it not so ?”

“ My conscience has a very gentle voice,” she replied, smiling ; “ it has not scolded me much yet.”

“ Well, never may it !” he returned. “ It

is a bad companion sometimes, so folks tell us. Some still it awhile—lull it with a soothing draught like an infant ; but the infant finds a tongue when it wakes, and bellows loudly.”

“ I should think Madame la Marquise’s would sleep for ever in a pure, undreaming rest,” said Vesey.

“ I am delighted you think so,” answered the General. “ The young are the best judges of the young : we old fellows sometimes grow churlish. Look up, Henriette, my wife and child !” and placing a hand under her chin he raised her face towards his gaze. Her look might have been an angel’s.

“ It is a sweet innocent countenance, is it not, Vesey ? No deceit written there.”

“ I should doubt Heaven itself, if I could suspect such a look as that,” he answered, with energy.

“ Brava ! brava !” cried the other, releasing Henriette, and shaking him warmly by the hand ; “ you are, indeed, a good, sincere friend : I cannot sufficiently esteem you.”

There was something unusual—unnatural in the General's manner : Vesey felt it, and after a few commonplace remarks, he rose to depart.

“What, leaving us?” cried the General.
“I fear I have driven you away?”

“No—no, not in the least. I have a pressing engagement.”

“Oh, then, indeed! But pray let us see you soon.”

“I shall not fail. A revoir, Madame;” and he offered his hand to Henriette, who freely gave hers.

“That is one of your English customs, I think—so charming!” exclaimed her husband, with vivacity. It carries with it so much friendship—such thrilling emotion, too, in a gentle pressure.”

Vesey looked at him, doubting for an instant his exact meaning : the other's face was unclouded and smiling ; he held out his hand.

“Let me, too, be remembered as a friend.”

Vesey could not draw back ; the clasp was warm and kindly.

“A revoir, mon ami,” said the General.

The other turned towards Madame de Rouvray with the gentleness he ever evinced. She rose; her manner was agitated, but the eyes were tearless now.

“Good-bye,” she said; “you will return soon, will you not? I have a question to ask you.”

“Shall I answer it now?” he said.

“No, my Lord,” interrupted Henriette, advancing; “not to-day, if you please. Maman is not very well; much conversation agitates her.”

“No, not to-day,” echoed the General. “Mon ami! it will be a motive to bring you again soon. You may then hear—and reply to what you hear.”

Vesey once more fixed his eye on the other, but all was calm in that face. Henriette did not feel the shaft; it passed her harmless.

“Are you going out to-day,” asked her husband, as the visitor departed; “or are you too much occupied with your painting? That rose is beautifully executed. I saw

Vesey had the original in his *boutonnière*. Did he bring it, or you give it ?”

“I gave it,” she answered. “I had copied it ; it was useless to me.”

“Are all flowers useless except for copying ? I thought ladies esteemed them as agreeable accessories to the ornament of a *salon* ?”

“No one is fonder of flowers than I am. Lord Vesey asked me for that rose, and I did not conceive that I was doing wrong in giving it to him.”

“Neither were you, *ma chère Henriette*,” he hastily said. “He is a man I esteem highly, and I wish you to do the same. I merely thought you were depriving yourself of a beautiful specimen ; such white moss-roses are very scarce. But you have not answered the question, as to whether you are going out to-day ?”

“Oh yes ; I am going to see my aunt, and Paula.”

“Alone !—that is, do you walk there ?”

She looked up, astonished at his questioning.

“Alone?—Yes. But I shall drive there ; for I want Paula to accompany me in a walk afterwards.”

“To the Tuileries?”

“Most probably, unless you wish me to go anywhere with you.”

“Oh no ! go there by all means ; you are sure to meet acquaintances.”

“I wish to do so, for Paula’s sake ; she is more gloomy than I like to see her.”

“The effect of committing a bad action ! What a great blessing it is for you to be so placid and cheerful !”

“I am not very cheerful,” she said, looking up with a quiet smile. “But I have nothing to reproach myself with ; why should I be sad ?”

He did not answer ; but casting one scowling look upon her, turned his eyes away, and walked towards the fire. Gem lay on a chair, his usual place of repose. The General took the little favourite by the neck, and flung it, with a loud oath, across the floor. The poor dog limped, howling, to Henriette’s side.

“Poor little Gem!” she said, caressing it, and looking reproachfully towards her husband; “in what has it offended you?”

“I detest dogs,” he answered, frowning—
“that one in particular; he is always in my way.”

She made no reply; there was a silence, broken at last by his ringing the bell with violence. When the servant came, he said,—

“Give orders for my carriage and post-chaise to-morrow. I am going to Fontainebleau at eleven.”

The man bowed and withdrew. Henriette laid down her pencils.

“This is a sudden resolution,” she said.
“Do you remain any length of time?”

“If you particularly wish it,” he sneered.

“I particularly wish it? Your manner compels me to say, it is a matter of indifference to me.”

“Indeed! Some ladies rejoice in having their liberty.”

“I do not require more than I possess; I should not know any use for it.”

“Indeed !”

There was another silence. At length he took up the book Lord Vesey had left. Some of the passages were underlined, a foolish practice, and best avoided, since it may sometimes lead to misinterpretations. The first one which met his eye was,—

“Vous l’ange d’autrefois, *maintenant* pauvre femme.”

“May I ask,” he said, no longer able to control his rage, “to whom this underlined passage is applied ?”

“I really don’t know,” she answered, trembling at his tone. “The book is not mine.”

“Not yours ? Then what is the meaning of this significant method of pointing to a passage ?”

“I again repeat,” she replied, her dignity coming to her aid, “that I know nothing of it ; though now *you* seem to attach so much consequence to it, and in such a tone, *I* may be permitted to feel its truth !”

She rose as she spoke, and placed her pencils in the paint-box.

“By Heaven!” he exclaimed, “your cool impertinence drives me beyond myself! The allusion is evident, and is encouraged by you.”

“You are forgetting, Monsieur le Général,” she said, calmly, “what is due to yourself, and still more, what is due to me.”

Madame de Rouvray sat in mute affright. She had never witnessed a similar scene, and she was pale and speechless with fear.

“Am I so forgetful?” he cried, in allusion to her last words. “Then thus I will remove all offence.”

He flung the book across the table into the chimney. Urged by an unaccountable impulse, her mother seized it before the fire had caught it. Opening the volume, at the first page her eye fell on a name and date. She sat, transfixed with a kind of terrified astonishment, gazing on it, and vainly endeavouring to speak. Before she could do so, the book fell from her hand, and she shrank back speechless, as though paralyzed.

Henriette flew to her side. The General, who had not noticed her previous agitation, thought the present the effect of alarm at his violence, and rang the bell passionately, without, however, one feeling of compunction. At that moment he would have slain the whole world. In his calmer moments he really liked Madame de Rouvray ; something like pity existed in his bosom for her. Then, too, Henriette loved her, and till that ill-starred day, that alone would have made him do so. Her child had seen all, and as she supported the fainting woman, awaiting the arrival of Manette, her eye fell on the page open at her feet. The inscription was simply this,—

“ Howard. Born, 18— ”

“ Yes, Lord Vesey was at college there,” she mentally said, “ and he mentioned that this book had been given him by a dear friend. I will ask him. Can Howard be —— ”

Manette entered before the thought had been matured.

CHAPTER IX.

“TELL Madame de Valerie’s maid to inform her mistress that la Comtesse de Cressy is here,” said the General to the servant who obeyed his summons in the *salon*, some time after the last scene.

“My dear General,” urged la Comtesse, “I really should put a stop, were I you, to all this absurd encouragement of the fancies of that *pauvre folle*. I am certain she can faint at pleasure. I should insist upon Henriette’s leaving her to her attendant; it is not at all becoming in la Marquise de la Valerie to be the slave she is to that woman! never giving soirées except when absolutely obliged—never being seen anywhere scarcely. I assure you, people

are talking, and will talk, and things which would pass unnoticed in a crowd are commented upon : this most singular seclusion is the topic of conversation."

"May I know to what you allude, Madame la Comtesse?"

"Why her being constantly attended by Milord Vesey ; you forget, General, you have a young wife. You should not leave her too much exposed to the censures of an envious world."

"May I again inquire *where* these supposed attentions take place?" he did not wish her to see his suspicions.

"Why, everywhere. I understand he is almost always here ; or if she calls upon me, he is her attendant : I hear of them every where together."

"Lord Vesey," observed the General, with apparent calmness, "is a particular friend of mine. Knowing Madame la Marquise gave me the preference in marriage, what have I to fear? Rely upon it, Madame, the day I *do* suspect and *prove*, my revenge shall be complete. Till then,

allow me to retain the enjoyment of my friend's society, and confidence in my wife."

"Oh, Heaven forbid," cried the silly, but not wickedly intentioned woman, "that I should say a word against the virtue of my niece! she is *my* niece—that is sufficient." And she drew herself up the whole height of the De Cressy genealogical tree.

Henriette entered at this moment from her mother's room—she was very pale.

"I never saw any one so altered as you are!" was her aunt's salutation. "You have grown ten years older in appearance! this comes of so much staying at home. I have been telling the General so."

"Allow me, Madame," answered Henriette, with calm dignity, "to be a mistress, not a slave, to a society I care little for. You know," she added, softening her tone, "that marriage gives ladies a certain amount of liberty; mine is shown in the preference of a quiet life."

"Perhaps too much so, for your reputa-

tion," replied her aunt, significantly bowing her head.

"What do you mean, Madame?" asked Henriette, colouring indignantly.

"Ah! well! the world will talk; it will, perhaps, say you seclude yourself from all for the sake of one."

"You forget, I cannot but think, Madame la Comtesse, that I am a wife?"

The General laughed, ironically; then translating his derision into words, said,—
"Of course she does, ma petite femme. You do well to remind all of that fact—some might forget it!"

"If," she said, rising, "the jeu d'épigrammes is to recommence, you will excuse me, but I shall retire. Madame la Comtesse is at home here, and will pardon me."

"Let us change the subject," said the General, taking her hand, and reseating her. Then turning to la Comtesse, he asked, "Why has not Mademoiselle Paula accompanied you? Is she not well?"

“Well!” she echoed, her thoughts directed into another channel. “Oh, yes, quite well. There is one of my greatest troubles—that girl. Would you believe that not all my arguments or prayers will induce her father to give his consent, or to send the necessary papers for the marriage of herself and de Brissac?”

“I am delighted,” exclaimed Henriette with heartfelt satisfaction. “I only trust in heaven my beloved, but estranged sister, will return to us all; and above all, to Edgar.”

“You really are a most provoking person,” answered her aunt, angrily; “one never receives any comfort from you. I think your father deserves any punishment which may fall upon him, for thus wilfully standing in his daughter’s light, for the sake of an absurd prejudice.”

“I am grieved if I offend you, Madame; but I again repeat, that nothing would afford me more sincere happiness than to see Paula’s marriage with that man prevented.”

“I really,” said her aunt, “shall begin to think you were in love with him yourself, and are envious. As much has been insinuated to me.”

Her niece did not condescend to reply, contenting herself by merely looking her fixedly and calmly in the face.

“What, with him too?” laughed the General, ironically. “In truth, *ma petite femme*, were such the case, your heart must be a capacious one, if I am to believe all the on-dits. But I acquit you of any wish to be *Madame l’Abbesse*.”

“And you may readily do so,” she rejoined.

He was about to reply, when Henri entered, whom his sister had not seen for some weeks, he having been to visit Edgar at Lyons. In a moment she was in his arms; and her face brightened. Here was some one to protect her. After warmly returning her caress, he turned to embrace his aunt; to the General he gave a hand. *La Comtesse* coldly advanced hers, and drew back from the kindlier welcome.

“Have I offended you, ma tante?” he asked; “it is quite unintentional if I have.”

“I must request you will drop the bourgeois style of ‘ma tante,’ she said, proudly; “I have told you before that I dislike it!”

“True, Madame la Comtesse, I had forgotten your interdict in the oft-permitted breach of it. But I see times are changed. Where is Paula?” he inquired, turning towards Henriette.

“At home, that is, at Madame de Cressy’s.”

“And pray, is not that her home?” asked the irritated woman; “for I pity from my soul, the poor, persecuted girl.”

“Her home should be with her sister, or my father,” said Henri, “away from the influence and the infatuation cast around her by that man!”

The General sat silent, delighted at these bickerings. By way of fomenting them, he alluded to a subject likely to do so, as he saw the other began to flag.

“And are you still as ardent as ever in your studies for the church?” he asked.

“Quite, when in Paris,” answered Henri, “but I have been absent at Lyons some weeks.”

“I am glad you have settled to something at last!” said la Comtesse; “I always knew you were exactly suited for the church!” (she quite forgot all she had once said against it.) Her nephew looked at her, an uncontrollable fit of laughter seized him. Even his sister smiled.

“If,” she said, rising angrily, “I am to be insulted in your house, Madame la Marquise, I shall at once quit it!”

“Indeed—” began her niece deprecatingly.

“Sit down, tantine—tantine still, despite all your coldness;” cried Henri, reseating her. “There was a time your neveu was a privileged person; n’importe! though *you* are made to forget, *I* don’t; and don’t many a kind word and action; perhaps, some day, you may remember them again!”

She sat down, looking rather abashed; he turned to his sister, and motioning to

her to follow him to the window, said, in a low tone :—

‘Get Paula here if you can this evening: don’t say I have returned.’

“Perhaps you call that polite,” snarled their inquisitive aunt.

“No I don’t,” he laughed, “but I wanted to know whether Henriette had seen my love.”

“Love,!” echoed la Comtesse, “are you going to commit some folly?”

“Possibly; I do every day—” he spoke in *badinage*. His end was attained: she was diverted from the subject.

“Henri,” asked his sister, “if you are going, would you take a letter for me?”

“Surely you have servants enough, without making your brother one,” growled the General.

“Possibly it is a letter a servant may not be trusted with,” hazarded her aunt, not out of a wish to insinuate evil, but from a love of talking.

“Henriette could not write, nor I be the bearer of such missives,” her brother answered with dignity.

She had heard so many inuendoes that the words scarcely affected her. She sat quietly down to write,—the General walked without hesitation to the table and looked over the first lines. Seeing his approach, she hastily wrote on a slip of paper “silence.” He had seen to whom she was writing, and turned away satisfied.

“Well,” inquired la Comtesse, “who is the correspondent?” This lady had become so debased by her confidential chatterings with Amélie, that she was losing all her self-dignity, and sinking into a perfect scandal-monger.

“The dressmaker, I believe,” answered the General.

Despite his previous unaccountable behaviour, she thanked him by a look. In her note she begged Paula to come to her, without naming Henri; trusting, perhaps, that some newer subject of conversation might banish the meeting with and return of her brother from her aunt’s thoughts. She merely said she much desired to see her. Henri took the letter and departed.

Henriette then anxiously sought to detain her aunt for half an hour, till the letter should have been received. At last la Comtesse departed, deploring her extreme wretchedness, the ingratitude of all the world, and her own relatives in particular, because her brother would not consent to the repulsive marriage of his child and the apostate priest.

Henriette heard frequently from the Curé Andriot, who deplored most sincerely all these events, and the wretchedness of his dear nephew. Her father, he said, was living in complete seclusion ; he would not even see him, and never went beyond the gates of the château. She resolved in her own mind to implore the General to allow her to go to des Ormes and see her father, but not as yet ; for even now she dreaded an interview with him. The fear with which he had formerly inspired her was even now uppermost in her mind.

When her aunt left, Henriette escaped to her mother's room, avoiding any more of those, to her, incomprehensible scenes of

dissension with her husband. She found her mother in a more painful state of misery and agitation than she had ever yet witnessed. Manette, in tears, was obliged to restrain her almost by force. When her child entered, she shrieked out, stretching her arms towards her,—

“You will not keep me in suspense—in ignorance, will you? You will bring him to me: only *he* can tell me all.”

“Of whom are you speaking, dearest mother?” she whispered, kneeling before her, and taking her hands in hers.

“Of Lord Vesey,” she returned, sobbing wildly. “He knows Howard—my Howard!—my son, my son, Henriette!” and her head dropped on her child’s bosom, almost a lifeless weight.

“That was his name,” whispered Manette.

“It is,” cried Madame de Rouvray, struggling again to free herself from the arms around her, and to rise; “for he lives—I know he lives: I shall see my boy again! Let me go, Manette; let me go to the world’s end, so I see my boy again!”

“Hush, dearest mother!” said Henriette, with pale lips; “hush, you shall see him! I will write to Lord Vesey; I will speak to him as to a brother, for I know he has a kind heart. I will ask him where Howard Waldron is. Be calm—pray be calm!” and she hushed her on her bosom like an infant.

“And shall I see him soon?” asked the pacified sufferer. “But where? Now?”

“Could Milord Vesey not come here?” suggested Manette.

“Oh yes, here, Henriette!” implored her mother. “I would ask him myself; he must know all.”

This appeal caused Henriette great anxiety. She was much troubled. It was the curse of such a marriage as hers, that the General’s manner forbade that entire confidence which should exist for real happiness between a married couple. Less to-day than ever durst she tell him all. Something—an unseen fear, arose within her, at the idea of inviting Lord Vesey to the more private apartments than the salons. Yet how refuse her mother? Yet still less

could she cast another gloom over that heart by expressing her recently awakened suspicion of the General's jealousy of Vesey. She pondered a moment ; then prompted by the conscious purity of her intentions, she exclaimed,—

“Dearest mother ! the General is going to Fontainebleau to-morrow, early. I will write to-night and ask Lord Vesey to come here at twelve. Will that do ?”

“Oh, would I could see him to-night ?” she cried, clasping her hands ; “there will be no rest or peace for me till I see him.”

“It will be impossible to-night without the General's knowing all. You would not like that.”

“No, no,” she answered faintly ; “Let no one know it. Then it must be to-morrow : but, oh, what a long, long tedious day to wait—for this one has scarcely begun.”

“Manette will read to you, Maman ; or will you go out for a drive or a walk with me ?”

“Oh, no,” she uttered, almost shuddering ; “not in the daylight.”

“Will you see dear Paula?” asked Henriette. “I expect her here to-day.”

“Not Paula, not any one but you, Henriette,” she said, almost in terror.

“Let Madame be quiet,” whispered Manette. “Ma bonne fille, you will ask Milord to come, won’t you?”

“Yes, I will write at once,” she answered with an effort; “but by whom shall I send the letter?”

“I will take it,” volunteered Manette. “It is safer and better. Madame will be quiet and content, won’t she?” she added affectionately, to that poor sufferer, “now she knows all shall be done to please her?”

“Yes, Manette, you are both very good to me,” she said, looking gratefully from one to the other; “but I hope I shall not trouble you long—I mean I shall be quite content and resigned when I know where Howard is, and that he lives.”

Henriette tenderly embraced her, and going to the table (they were in her mother’s small sitting-room, adjoining her bed-

chamber), she wrote a few lines to Lord Vesey. They ran thus:—

“Will you call to-morrow at twelve o’clock? I have something of the utmost importance to converse with you about. My husband will be absent; but as I have much to say, my mother’s maid, an old confidential servant, shall conduct you to her private apartment, where we can speak undisturbed. I will satisfactorily explain the motive of this strange letter when we meet.”

She deemed it safest to sign no name, for fear of the letter being seen by others, as he might incautiously leave it on his table. A few days before she would have written differently; to-day, the General’s manner, by alarming her, made her guilty of a gross error in writing so ambiguously. Manette carried the letter. Arriving at Vesey’s hotel, she inquired for his apartment, as she had a letter of the utmost importance to deliver.

“Milord has gone out,” answered the

concièrge ; but the valet de Milord is in his apartment, au premier !”

She mounted the staircase and rang the bell.

“From whom is it ?” asked the man, as he took the note in his hand.

“Milord does not know the writer,” answered the cautious Manette, yet blushing for her untruth.

“Will he soon be at home ?”

“Yes, I expect him every moment, to dress.”

“Then be kind enough not to delay giving it,” she said, turning away with a “good-day.”

The valet closed the door, another hand as hastily opened it beside him, with,—

“Let me look, I know that voice. I thought so,” continued Amélie (for it was she), after cautiously looking down the stairs, “Cette vieille Manette ! ah, Madame la devote ! so you carry love-letters, do you ?”

As she spoke, she took the note from the valet’s hand.

“As I suspected,” she cried, exultingly. “From Madame la Marquise ! I know her *pattes de mouche* writing.”

“Perhaps it is only an invitation, or something of the sort,” answered the valet, with a feeling of compunction.

“Invitation !” well, I dare say it may be, but not to dine with Monsieur, I’ll answer for it. Manette would’nt carry such letters—they would be sent by her servant.”

“True,” replied the latter, thoughtfully.

“I must have that letter, Louis,” she said, after a pause, “as soon as Milord has read it. Stay : could we not read the contents now, and reseal it ?”

“Oh, no !” he exclaimed, in terror, “I would not break a seal for worlds. And more, Amélie—I cannot think what makes you so very curious about my master.”

Don’t be deceitful and hypocritical,” she replied ; “you know you like to be acquainted with his doings just as well as myself : mine is mere curiosity, for Madame la Marquise is so prudish—so *begueule*.”

She did not, as we know, speak her real feelings ; she never had forgiven Henriette's scorn of her. She had sworn revenge at the time, and that, combined with a mercenary spirit, urged her on to brave and overcome all obstacles.

“ Well,” he said, “ I must try and get it, but no touching it before Milord has read it. I dare say I can manage it après.”

“ Be sure you do, this evening, and I will give you the beau cadeau I promised you—that breast pin you admired so much. I like obliging those who are kind to me. Now adieu, and don't fail.”

She was on the point of opening the door, when many footsteps were heard ascending the stairs ; and immediately afterwards there was a loud pull at the bell. Amélie hurried into a large closet in the ante-chamber, and the valet opened the door, giving admission to two men bearing Lord Vesey between them, faint and pale.

In endeavouring to rescue a child from beneath a carriage-wheel, he had himself been thrown down and injured ; his ankle

was sprained, and having received a kick on the head, it was deemed necessary by the medical attendant who had been summoned on the instant, that he should be bled. Still he was not very seriously hurt, and was perfectly sensible.

Amélie waited to hear the result of the doctor's report, and then left, saying to her friend the valet :—

“I will return this evening : don't forget the note, when he is more composed. Remember, I must have it, à revoir !”

And she glided away.

CHAPTER X.

PAULA had not seen her sister for some days, and then only in the presence of others. She could not question her own heart, and dreaded laying any of its feelings bare, even to her sister's eye. Yet she suffered keenly ; her soul yearned towards that beloved companion of all her pure and happy hours. Oh ! how she would have rejoiced to throw her arms around that neck, and say :—

“Take me once again, my sister, and teach me the way to true happiness, for I am wretched !”

And yet, so great was her infatuation for de Brissac, that though she durst not ask her soul to approve him, knowing it must

condemn, though she durst not think of him in absence, lest she should despise—still she clung to him, and felt that to lose him would be worse than a thousand deaths. Hers was truly a blind passion. Could her moral vision be freed from that which obscured it, she would have turned in horror from the spectacle that confronted her.

Henriette's letter, for a wonder, reached her unknown to Amélie, who was absent as we have shown. She pressed it to her lips, and felt—oh! more than ever—how dear to her would be a perfect reconciliation with her sister.

“I will go,” she mentally said, “the moment my aunt returns : but why not now ? He will come immediately after dinner, and then I could not leave.”

Hastily writing a few lines apprising Madame la Comtesse where she was gone, she dressed, and attended by a *valet de pied*, set out for Henriette's.

A few steps from la Comtesse's, de Bris-sac met her.

“I was coming,” he said, “to ask you to

take a walk. I am fortunate in meeting you, Paula. I should have regretted much not finding you." He offered his arm. "Where are you going, dearest?"

"To Henriette's," she replied. "She wishes to see me; we have not met for some days."

"Don't go this day, then; oblige me. I always dread your meetings with your sister; I know how much she dislikes me. And now, all seems so hopeless around us! Your father's obstinate refusal—Oh, Paula!" and his intense eyes fixed themselves wildly on her face. "Swear to me nothing shall tempt you to forsake me! That fear is ever upon me. You must know how lost I should be if I lost you."

There was agony in his tone. She looked up in his face. "Melchior," she replied, "why should you fear? There is more than an ordinary tie between us; there is one of——" she stopped.

"Sin, you would say, Paula!" his voice was sad. "Well, if it be so, let our love

absolve us ; that may excuse much. But promise me, dearest—come what will, happen what may—you never will forsake or detest me.”

“What could make me do so?” she asked, surprised at his earnest tone.

“I scarcely know ; the world has many paths. In one of these you may meet a spectre—a vision of the past ; it may affright you.”

“I have borne too much,” she replied, sadly, “in my father’s curse—in the reality of that—to allow a mere shadow to turn me aside.”

He pressed her arm. They had entered the Luxembourg Gardens, and were crossing them towards Henriette’s ; he looked behind him.

“Don’t go to your sister’s to-day ! Oblige me—I do earnestly beg it of you ! Send your servant to say you will call to-morrow ; he can return to us here.”

“Oh no !” she cried, shrinking, “I must see Helriette ; and it is growing dusk.

My aunt is so rigid in her notions of propriety, that she would never forgive my being out alone — even with you.”

“ And do you fear me ?”

“ Oh no !—why should I ?” yet she trembled.

“ Then send him to say you will come in an hour. No one will know how long we have been together ; it is so seldom we meet alone. I will silence the servant. But an hour, Paula—but *one* hour !” His voice trembled with more emotion than the occasion might naturally be supposed to call forth. She looked at him ; he was paler even than usual.”

“ No,” she answered, decisively, scarce knowing why his manner should so alarm her ; “ I cannot : do not ask me.”

“ Then you do not, indeed, love me as I love you. I would risk a thousand times more than I have lost for you. Risk, did I say ? Lose, Paula, lose—everything but your love. Oh, if you loved me, no cold obstinacy of a father, no influence of mere friends, would weigh with you ! Fly-

ing with me, you would force them to consent! How can they judge of our love? What can the hearts, frozen beneath the ice of years, remember of their genial warmth of youth?" Paula, be mine," and his voice sank to a low whisper. They were beneath the high, though leafless trees, and a sky darker than twilight was above them. "Mine, dearest." He grasped her trembling hand in his, which could scarcely clasp it, such was his agitation. "Let us fly, Paula, at once: your father will then pardon us."

"Melchior," she exclaimed, stopping and fixing her dilated eyes in terror on him, "tu me fais peur!"

"Oh, do not fear me! it is the dread of losing you which makes me seem desperate. Do not pause to think: I have provided means!"

She trembled so much that her limbs refused to support her. She saw he was endeavouring to urge her a different way to the one they had been going. A mist seemed to gather before her eyes; it was

not irresolution or weakness, but terror—sheer, unmitigated terror. She saw him turn towards the servant, and indistinctly the name of “La Marquise” fell on her ear. At that critical moment—for she was powerless—a hand clasped her other arm, and a well-known voice recalled her to consciousness. It was the voice of Manette, who was returning from Lord Vesey’s.

“I thought it was you, *ma fille*,” she said. “It is nearly dark, but I knew your figure. I have been running after you; you are taking the wrong turning—this is not the way to your sister’s. You are going there, are you not?”

De Brissac wiped the heavy dew from his brow and hair—the cold sweat of hopes destroyed. He groaned aloud.

Paula did not speak, but clung to Manette’s arm.

“You are trembling, *mon enfant*; the evening is damp. Take your nurse’s arm. Monsieur will excuse it, I know.”

“I am cold,” said Paula, shivering.

“*Pauvre enfant*, you are too lightly clad.

Make haste, Madame will be so glad to see you. Allez ! it seems an age !”

And she continued to talk on, until they reached Henriette’s.

“ You will walk home with your servant, will you not ?” de Brissac whispered at the door. “ Pray do ; I beseech you, do ! And let me call for you, or meet you. Do not fear me again ! I was mad ; I am calm now ! Will you ?”

“ I do not know,” she replied, in agitation. “ I do not think I shall return alone ; my aunt—” she could say no more, her lips were parched.

“ True, your aunt will send her carriage ; I may then come for you ; I will call and say so at l’Hôtel de Cressy. Keep me in your mind, Paula, in all the conversations you may hear to-night ! Forget all which might influence you against me, and remember only my love—my undying love !” He pressed her hand almost convulsively, and turned away.

The sisters were alone once more. Paula was unable to conquer her terror, which had

left its traces on her countenance. In vain Henriette inquired the cause of her agitation : she could sooner have died, than have sought in her affrighted mind to embody her fear : she turned suddenly from all self-examination. Her sister would not tell her that Henri had returned. She had received a line from him, saying that in the evening he should come, and begging Henriette to be alone with Paula

He had quitted the house without finding an opportunity of relating the results of his visit to Edgar, about which Henriette was painfully anxious, and awaited the evening in a state of much mental uneasiness, deeming it probable that Henri wished to state all before Paula.

She had shown his note to the General, who readily consented to its request, feeling certain that his object was, to break off the marriage with de Brissac, a match which, being allied to the family, was most distasteful to him.

Henriette had resolved to say little to Paula touching her engagement to de Brissac,

although it was uppermost in her thoughts. She decided that it was best to wait till Henri should be there; she felt he had some scheme, at present unknown to her, but when allusion was made by Manette to her having met her and de Brissac in the gardens, Paula turned very pale. Henriette gazed with astonishment at her almost convulsed countenance.

“Has anything alarmed you?” she anxiously inquired.

“No—that is—no, I do not know,” She stammered.

“Tell me, pray tell me, darling,” entreated the other, taking her hand fondly. Manette discreetly withdrew. Paula was silent some moments, then looking up in her sister’s face, with all the confidence of years gone by, she said :

“Henriette, you will think me mad when you have heard what I am going to say—but you condemn more by your silence than harsh words could do—my love for Melchoir de Brissac. But, not all your censure, implied or expressed, can equal my detesta-

tion of myself. I love,—oh I think I love that man ; and yet, I dare not when alone think of him,—it frightens me to do so—now,” and she shuddered, “more than ever !”

“Paula dearest, my own Paula,” exclaimed her sister, with swimming eyes. “If that is the case you really cannot love him. Love !” she cried enthusiastically, “Love, true, sincere love, has but one foundation, which is esteem—it is a key which opens the whole soul and heart ; our only fear is, lest a cloud passing over the light of day, should veil any corner of that soul from the gaze of him we love ; and by the power of that spiritual affection which we feel, do we dive into his heart, to see ourselves as in a bright mirror reflected there. To fear him, we must dread ourselves ; to shrink from him, there must be some hidden doubt in our own mind, bidding us suspect him ! Paula, if you fear him so much, you do not love.”

“Henriette, you have loved !” And she looked full in her eyes. “But whom ?”

“A dream, my sister, which fled before daybreak, and never saw the sun. Let us not talk of it.”

“Henriette, Melchoir comes for me to-night in my aunt’s carriage. I—I would not return alone with him. Bid Manette accompany us!”

“I should not have allowed it, had you not added that request, Paula. The world is too censorious: you may never be his wife!” She looked fixedly at her.

“I am pledged—bound irrevocably. And I love, though I fear him! But oh! I am most unhappy!”

“And would you,” cried her sister, “trust yourself for life to the man to whose honour you dare not confide your own for one hour?”

Paula could not reply, but looked down, and sighed.

“Come,” said Henriette, rising, wishing to terminate the conversation, and scarcely knowing how far she might not be interfering with Henri’s plans, whatever they were, “let us go down to the *salon*. The

General will be awaiting us, else, for dinner. I will not tire you further now!"

The General appeared in an amiable mood—at all events, he was desirous of seeming so. He received Paula most kindly, and avoided every word which could annoy her, never once asking about de Brissac. Of Henri he did not speak, having been enjoined to silence respecting him. Henriette had almost forgotten her husband's strange conduct on the morning. It was only recalled to her mind partially when he mentioned his projected journey to Fontainebleau on the morrow.

"I shall return late," he said, "and have just recollected that my agent from my estate in Brittany was to send a friend to me some day this week, for a roll of plans of some cottages which I wish to build there. I will leave them with you, Henriette. Should a letter arrive with *pressée* on it, open it; and if from him—as it can only be—give the roll to the messenger."

"Were it not better, for fear of mistakes, to bid the man return next day?"

“No,” he answered; “for he may possibly be merely passing through Paris.”

“I will attend to it, then.”

“You will oblige me.”

They were at dessert. A servant entered and informed Henriette that her presence was required in the *salon*.

“Oh, it is your mysterious visitor of this morning,” said the General, favouring the innocent deception towards Paula. “Go; I am not jealous. I shall remain here—or rather no—I’ll go and prepare my roll of plans. Take your sister with you.”

“Come, darling!” she cried, rising, “let us go.”

Paula, suspecting nothing, followed her. They traversed a large *salon*, and Henriette opened the door of the one in which we have seen her that morning. Henri stood there. His youngest sister bounded forward to meet him. As she did so, the door closed, and a heavy sigh smote on her ear. She turned at the sound, as did Henriette—Edgar Andriot stood beside the door. Paula shrieked, and sprang for-

ward, clinging to her brother ; Henriette's hands were clasped in the young soldier's, for he had seized them ; but they might have been those of some dying comrade's on a battle-field, so cold were they : and, truly, the struggle had been hard within her to make them thus. He had come so unexpectedly, that she had had no time to restrain her rebel heart ; and as she looked up tremblingly in his face, a scroll seemed before her eyes, on which were written the words of his letter, " Henriette, have we known our own hearts ? "

" Look up, little sister ; look up, Paula," said Henri ; " and though all else may no longer be, do not refuse a friendly welcome to one I love. Come, Edgar ; be a man and a soldier ; here's a little hand to greet you."

And he held Paula's trembling one towards him ; and Edgar loosened Henriette's, and gently taking Paula's, bent down and kissed it. She could not look at him. In vain Henri drew her face from his bosom, and turned it to meet his eye ; hers

closed, as in blindness—it was the lightning of conscience which seared them.

“One look, Paula,” said Edgar, “one to show me you do not quite hate me. Look at me as on a playfellow of our younger days; forget the past miserable months. Do Paula,” his voice faltered as he besought her. She turned to Henri’s breast, and her whole frame shook, as her tears welled forth.

Her brother tried to loosen her hold, and place her in Edgar’s arms. “Come,” he whispered to Henriette, who stood beside him, still gently trying to release her arms, “leave them together; her good and noble heart will then speak, and turn back from the dark path and be happy once more.”

“No,” Paula cried, in intense agony, flinging her arms convulsively by a sudden movement round her brother’s neck, and gazing wildly in his face. “In mercy’s name do not leave us together! I should die; I cannot look upon him! Oh, bid him go! bid him go! bid him go!” she frantically exclaimed.

“Paula,” said Edgar, in a voice which no longer trembled. “Paula, hear me. When I came here this evening, it was with no thought of seeing you ; what is done has been kindly done by Henri : but he assured me that only Henriette would be here, or I should never have come to pain you. When last we met—now months since—your too apparent coldness made me examine my own heart, for I wondered that, after the first pang, I felt it so little, and then I doubted if we had not mistaken our hearts. I wrote to ask you this—you were silent. I wrote, releasing you from every tie—you were silent still ; and in that silence I have read your concurrence. I suffered at first, for that short, mistaken dream has wrecked my every chance of happiness ; that boy’s dream has blighted a reality.”

He sighed deeply, and dropped his thoughtful gaze on the ground. As he raised his eyes they rested, as if involuntarily, on Henriette’s averted face. She felt, but did not meet the look.

“Paula,” he continued, “may you be happy in your choice. Let no thought of me mar your peace. I have forgotten our dream of love. I only love a sister. May heaven bless you !”

Her grasp relaxed from Henri’s neck, and dropping on the ottoman, she hid her face in both hands, and casting herself on the pillows with averted countenance, sobbed hysterically.

Henriette approached to soothe her. Starting up wildly, her eyes fixed themselves with an almost insane gaze on Edgar, who stood calm and still, and before anyone could arrest her steps, with one spring she reached the door and fled.

Henriette followed, and found her in her dressing room with trembling hands preparing to depart.

“Was it well, or kindly done?” she cried, as her sister entered. “Oh Henriette, I would not so have pained you, Heaven help me !” and she paced the room, vainly endeavouring to arrange her dress, her hands trembled so much.

“Paula, hear me ; I knew not Edgar was coming,—on my solemn word I did not ; but had I—perhaps I should have consented to try and save——,”

“Save, save !” she almost shrieked, “I am lost, lost past hope. I see all now,—all, But who may save me ?” she scarcely knew what she uttered.

“I will, Paula dearest ; I will, only let me,” and she clasped her in her arms. “Do not return to my aunt’s ; stay with me, stay with Henri, and your father,—think of him ; of our father, dear, of that broken-hearted man,”—her voice trembled as she implored.

“I,” cried the other, wildly, “I see him, my father who cursed me ? see Edgar ? Henri ? all ? I who have polluted my soul by this mad love ? this infatuation, this fatal dream ?” She tore herself away from her sister and again paced the room. “I must be mad,” she said more calmly, after some moments, “to speak thus—mad,—oh, it was ill done to try my poor weak heart so sorely,” and seating herself, she sank for some minutes into a deep silence.

“Stay with me, Paula,” pleaded Henriette, “just this night. I promise you, you shall see no one but Manette, not even Maman. Stay, I beseech you, stay!”

“No,” she said, rising, calm and resolved. “I have chosen, and will abide by my choice; it is useless urging me. I am too weak to bear much—I shall become desperate; and then Heaven help me! While Melchoir is all I believe him to be, whether it be sin, whether it bring sorrow and bitterness, I will abide by it. If I have allowed this infatuation to overcome me, I must suffer the penalty. Why should another? Is *one* victim not enough?”

“Oh,” cried Henriette, in trembling hope that her words might yet avail; “pause, Paula: withdraw your steps from this dreadful precipice; marry not one whom you may live to despise—an apostate, even though he be one for your sake! I entreat you pause!”

“Hush!” answered the sister; “I must hear no more: this but adds to my sin. Hush, some one comes.”

A rap came to the door: Mélanie opened it.

“Madame de Cressy,” she said, “has sent her carriage for Mademoiselle, and Amélie is also below to accompany her.”

“Amélie?” she cried; “I would rather Manette; but no, ’tis best so — I am ready.”

“Let Henri go with you,” whispered her sister.

“No, Henriette; if you love me, let me go alone to-night. I am calm now, and I need calmness. Do not urge me; we shall meet soon. Heaven bless you, my beloved sister!”

And her arms clasped her neck. Henriette feared again to urge the subject, but resolved to seek her the following day, and once more endeavour gently to lead, but not to alarm her shaken spirits. Embracing her tenderly, she consented to her departure. Little as she liked Amélie with her for a protection, she had no fear for Paula. She did not even then know that

wretch ; for had De Brissac been less confident in himself, he might have made her his worst tool. As it was, Paula with her was safe—she had received no bribe from De Brissac.

“Then this letter,” said the General, who sat in his library while the above scene took place, conversing with Amélie, “is the only one which has passed between them, you are sure ?”

He spoke with cold, pale lips—ever a bad sign in a man. He held Henriette’s to Vesey in his hand.

“I am certain, Monsieur le Général. When Milord was brought in, after being bled, he slept for an hour, and awoke refreshed. Louis then gave him this letter, which after reading it over and over again, with evident delight, he placed beneath his pillow. Presently, asking for pen and paper, he tried to write, but could not. This seemed to irritate him. He endeavoured to rise, but his side and ankle prevented him ; so he lay down, and murmured some-

thing about 'early in the morning.' Then he became composed, and falling asleep, Louis took the letter away unperceived."

"But he will miss and inquire for it."

"Louis will make some excuse for not finding it; he is not a fool."

"Well, but I must have his reply to her with an unbroken seal; it must never reach her. See to this."

"Monsieur may rely upon us: we are two now."

"And require a double fee, is that it?—there, that will satisfy you. Should he write, I must have his letter on my return to-morrow. Should he be enabled to come, you can arrange with Mélanie. I must know all. See to that also."

"Mademoiselle de Rouvray is inquiring for Mademoiselle Amélie," said the General's confidential valet, looking in.

"Go," said the General,—“and remember!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE following morning Lord Vesey was so much recovered from the effects of his fall that he was enabled to leave his bed and lie on the sofa ; nevertheless he found it would be totally impossible to attempt leaving the house. In this state of extreme annoyance, he prepared at an early hour to write to Henriette.

“Louis,” he cried, summoning his valet, “have you searched everywhere for the letter I lost ? I placed it beneath my pillow, I think.”

“Yes, Milord,” answered the man ; “I can assure you it is not here anywhere : I have looked in every corner.”

“Provoking !” Vesey exclaimed. “But,”

he added to himself, "there is one comfort, the fellow don't read particularly well — besides, he is not inquisitive. It was certainly under my pillow."

He then began writing a reply to the letter, and the watchful eye of his valet never quitted him.

"You may go," said his master at last, though without any definite suspicion; "I hate a fellow staring at me when I am writing. How shall I send this note?" he asked himself, when at last he completed one to his satisfaction. "I know Louis is faithful, but I dare not trust others; it must be delivered safe into her own hand."

Fortune favoured him; at that moment his friend, whom we have before seen as the bearer of "Gem" from England, called. After all inquiries duly answered about his accident, he said,—

"You are the very fellow I want. Will you be the bearer of a letter for me, and deliver it into the lady's own hand?"

"Willingly, if that hand be held out towards me. To whom is it?"

“To la Marquise de la Valerie.”

“Mademoiselle de Rouvray! Surely, Vesey, you are not mad enough to entangle yourself with a married woman. What can it lead to?”

“You are wrong,” answered his friend, with energy. “Between Madame de la Valerie and myself there does not exist a thought but of the purest nature. From my soul I reverence her, for her many high qualities, being married as she is—an accursed marriage forced upon her.”

“A high-minded girl would never have consented to such a marriage, and still less would she now correspond with you.”

Woman, poor woman! thus are your best deeds too often denounced as the blackest, and yourselves condemned unheard!

“On my soul,” cried Vesey, fervently, “you wrong her! if ever a pure and noble creature existed, it is she.”

“Ah well!” answered the other, with a shrug; “we always think so till we find them out! But give me the note; I pro-

mise you it shall only reach her hand from mine. I am glad, at all events, you don't send your fellow. I don't like that man. He never looks you in the face."

"George, what a suspicious wretch you are! I believe Louis to be a most trustworthy creature!"

"Enjoy your opinion; better suspect wrongly than be deceived!"

"Oh no, better be once, nay twice, thrice deceived, than suspect all the world!" cried Vesey, warmly.

"I suppose I have only to send up my card, and ask for her?"

"Yes, George, but not till past twelve; the husband will be out then!"

"Ah! ha! ha!" laughed the other. "Is this an intimation from your pure friend? But there, I won't annoy you, I'm off. I'll look in on my return." And with these elevating thoughts of the lady to whom he was commissioned, he started for Henriette's.

Louis had just time to escape from the keyhole, where he had seen all, though he

had not understood the words—they spoke in English.

The General was gone to Fontainebleau, after—to lull all suspicion—taking a kind leave of his wife. She sat with her mother, consoling her for her disappointment in not seeing Vesey, as she had hoped to do. The General had carefully named his accident at breakfast, watching Henriette's face as he spoke. Not all her efforts could prevent a momentary change of colour. She then, with real interest, inquired the particulars. Her start and blush rankled in the General's soul; nevertheless, he smiled—smiled over the grave of his hopes, for he really loved his wife sincerely.

She had a difficult task in consoling Madame de Rouvray, for she had reckoned the moments till she should see Lord Vesey with nervously irritable anxiety. Whilst she sat thus employed, Mélanie entered, and said a gentleman wished to see her below, handing a card as she spoke.

“It is Edgar, I dare say,” she said, in a low tone; “he promised to call to-day,”

taking the card. The name for a moment puzzled her. "A stranger? Where have I seen this name?" Then suddenly recollecting, she whispered her mother,— "It is some one from Lord Vesey; I will return the moment he is gone." And, quitting the room, she descended to the *salon*.

Her visitor was more frigid than on the former occasion of his waiting upon her. Before, she had been a mere stranger, now she was a woman he despised. He was the type, not often found in young men, of stern, English morality.

"I come," he said, after an awkward pause, "Madame la Marquise, as the bearer of a letter from my friend, Lord Vesey."

"How is his Lordship?" she anxiously asked; "I learnt his accident with deep regret."

"Better," he coldly answered; "and yet unable to leave home. Under these circumstances, he requested me, as one in whom he has entire confidence, to deliver this letter, and bear any reply you might

have to send. Servants are best avoided in these cases."

The "in these cases" smote Henriette to the heart: in the anxious wish to oblige and serve her mother, much had been overlooked in the act she had been guilty of,—namely, writing to Lord Vesey. Now his friend's words removed the bandage from her eyes, and she coloured most painfully.

"I hope and trust," she stammered, "that Lord Vesey has not left you in ignorance of my real motive in writing?"

(She quite forgot that Vesey himself was ignorant of it. The gentleman smiled half ironically.)

"Vesey," he replied, "entered into no particulars with me. Pray be not alarmed. I have been his schoolfellow from early boyhood: he can trust me in all things."

She felt how vain would be the attempt to make him believe in her innocence.

"This," she mentally said, taking the letter, "will prove it to him."

She opened and read: it ran thus:—

"I adopt the caution you have given me

an example of, in avoiding names. It would be impossible to tell you—to make you comprehend my annoyance at my unforeseen accident. I have vainly attempted to walk. And when may I see you again, as I might have done to day? There is so much I have to say to you on that subject nearest my heart, which you alone know. And I so seldom see you alone. When will he be again absent? Whatever you wish to say, write it freely by the bearer. You know I would go to the world's end to serve you. Now, as ever, there can be but one sentiment in my heart towards you. If what you wish to tell me will not brook delay, with that confidence you know you can place in my honour come here: bring some person with you, on whom you can rely, if you fear to come alone. Leaving your carriage at the gate of the Tuileries, you might walk: no one would know you. To me, the visit would bring that comfort I never fail to find when I am near you,—more especially if I can serve or oblige you.”

Even the cold phlegmatic George Manleigh was not proof against the access of some emotion, when he witnessed hers. She arose from her seat, and crushing the letter in her hand, said, after pacing the room an instant, in disorder,—

“Tell Lord Vesey that it was not for myself I desired the interview, but for my mother. Tell him, I alone chose the moment of my husband’s absence because my mother wished, in an uninterrupted conversation, to ask him some questions about a friend of his.” With every word offended pride gave fresh nobility to her face and figure. Even Manleigh stood abashed and contrite before her. “Perhaps,” she continued, “Mr. Manleigh, you, as a school-fellow of Lord Vesey’s, can as well answer the question, and save any further mystery in this most painful affair.”

In her annoyance, she even doubted for a moment Vesey’s nobility of mind and purity of friendship ; and felt how utterly impossible it would be to attempt to clear herself in that messenger’s eyes from the suspicion

of an intrigue, by showing so ambiguous a letter.

“Madame la Marquise,” he answered, with genuine warmth and feeling, “in all things command me !”

“May I ask,” she said, lowering her voice to a whisper ; “did you ever meet, or hear of a—a—Howard Waldron ?”

“Howard Waldron ?” he echoed, in the utmost surprise, “Howard Waldron is Vesey himself !”

“Vesey !” she almost shrieked, turning ghastly pale, and clinging to a chair, as her mind for a moment followed up the train of thought engendered by Manleigh’s strange manner, and Vesey’s almost incomprehensible letter.

“He—Howard Waldron ! and if—if—Merciful heaven ! this would be a fearful retribution !”

Mr. Manleigh thought for an instant that she was going mad. He had travelled much, knew all that books might teach, or German universities propound ; but he knew not how to deal with a fainting woman, never having

seen one. He feared that Henriette was on the point of doing so, and springing forward with one hand he supported her, and with the other violently rang the bell.

“Send Madame la Marquise’s maid,” he cried, “as the servant entered.

“I am better, thank you,” she whispered, sinking into a chair; “pray forgive me, and endeavour to forget it, and tell him—*him*—Lord Vesey,” she spoke with difficulty; “that he shall hear from, or see me soon, But not to write, oh! beg him not to write!”

“I will do all you can desire. May I call and inquire after your health?” asked the really kind Manleigh; “or I may be of some service to you?”

Before she could answer, Mélanie entered.

“Is Madame la Marquise indisposed?” she exclaimed, hurrying forward; and seizing a *flacon* on the table, she approached her mistress, who leant back in her chair, pale and faint.

“I will take my leave,” said Mr. Manleigh, making a step towards her, and utter-

ing a few hurried words, he took his departure leaving her almost in a stupor.

“She is a nice creature,” cried Manleigh, as he entered Vesey’s room shortly afterwards; “and I have much wronged her. That woman is pure and innocent, is she not?”

“As an angel, I believe!”

“By George!” exclaimed the other starting up. “What became of the letter? I wish I had secured it!”

“What letter, George? don’t you see that I am in an agony of suspense? Pray tell me all about your interview.”

“My dear fellow, I am in a maze—listen!” And he related all that passed.

“What can my name be to her or her mother?” asked Vesey, thoughtfully. “I must see her, or write.”

“Pray don’t, Howard. She begged you wouldn’t—promising to do so herself, or see you.”

The two friends talked much of the whole affair, without finding any plausible cause for Henriette’s agitation. We will leave

them in this state of astonishment, and return to Henriette.

After the first shock, which a doubt in her mind occasioned her, a gentler feeling assumed its place. Vesey her brother—but how? In her dreadful agitation she had forgotten to make any inquiries of his friend. Then she remembered something having been said by him about his father's coming into the title unexpectedly. All this must be explained—but how? She durst not write—and how see him? Her mind was fearfully perplexed. Should she tell her mother? No, not till she were well assured; there might be a mistake. And yet an inward feeling told her that it was so—that Vesey was her brother; she had ever from the first, as a stranger, felt such an affection towards him. But what as to his feelings? He could not have deceived her—he could not have loved her otherwise than as a brother? And as these thoughts coursed through her brain, she started up, and looked around her—on the ground—everywhere.

“Does Madame seek anything?” inquired Mélanie, who had been attentively scanning her countenance.

“Yes,” she replied, “a letter. There was one—where is it?”

“Oh,” answered Mélanie, “I found some paper on the floor, *chiffonné*. I flung it into the fire. I hope, Madame, it is of no consequence?”

“Are you certain you did?” she eagerly asked.

“Oh yes, Madame, tenez;” and she went towards the chimney. “Here are some of the ashes.”

Her mistress slightly glanced, and then turned away. “I should like to have perused it again,” she murmured; “but perhaps it is best and safest thus.”

“You may go, Mélanie,” she said, aloud; “leave me to myself. Do not mention this to any one.” (She thought of her mother.)

“Oh! Madame ought to know my discretion. I would not for the world.” And

with an humble look of sorrow she withdrew.

Outside the door she paused, and taking a crushed paper from her apron pocket, smoothed and placed it in her bosom, carefully.

Henriette sat for some time in unutterable perplexity. What could she do? She thought of telling the General; yet she feared doing so. To her mother she would gradually break the intelligence; to Henri and Paula it should remain, if possible, for ever unknown, for they were—and was it not best they should remain so?—ignorant of their mother's history. Then came the worst task of all—Vesey must be told. She could not well devise how, neither was she in a fit state of mind to think very deeply:—she felt bewildered.

As she sat thus, a servant entered.

“There is a man below inquiring for Monsieur le Général,” he said, “and Monsieur left orders if such a person came, Madame la Marquise was to answer him.”

"Has he a letter?" she inquired. "I remember now such a man was expected."

"I will see, Madam;" and he disappeared.

"I am little fit for business," she said, as the door closed; "however, I shall offend the General if I neglect this," and she passed her hand across her brow.

"Here is one, Madame," said the servant, returning. "The man says it is 'pressée,' but no reply is required."

"But he is not gone, is he?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame la Marquise; he merely said Monsieur le Général was to be sure to read the inclosed directly, as it immediately concerned him."

"Very well," she answered, and the man withdrew.

Her mind filled with other thoughts, she broke the envelope; another letter was inside, the seal towards her. Without looking at the superscription, having seen that the outer one was directed to her husband, she listlessly opened it; it was clumsily

folded and sealed. We will give the meaning, not the orthography or style.

“Monsieur,” it began, “will most probably have forgotten me, as it is so long since we met. Monsieur will remember when we parted in the Tuileries that morning that he gave me his card, desiring me to write as soon as ever I saw that tall, dark monsieur again, who sent me to the Rue Jacob with a small box.”

Henriette started: this could not be from the agent. From whom then? she turned to the address, it was,—

“To Monsieur Durand, Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière 5.”

“This cannot be to the General,” she thought, “I have done wrong in opening it.”

Looking inside the first envelope she saw a line: it was,—

“Monsieur le Général, this letter was brought by a *commissionaire* to your fictitious address; he says it is ‘Très pressée,’ so I lose no time in forwarding it.

“BONNEAU.”

Deeply interested, Henriette read on : the General had ordered her to do so ; in fact, she was too bewildered to reason about the matter. The first letter continued,—

“Well, Monsieur, I have never seen ce Monsieur till a few days since, when he came again ; he was differently dressed, for both times before he wore a long, large cloak, which almost covered him. However I knew him directly, in spite of the change of dress. He bade me meet him in the gardens, and passed on. I have since been every day paid by him to watch a large belle maison in the Faubourg St. Germain, and he has taken a room in a maison meublée close by. He desired me the moment I saw a lady come out (whom he described) alone, with either a man or maid servant, to run and tell him. Yesterday evening she came, followed by a *vale de pied*, and I knew directly the dark, handsome young lady I had seen in the Rue Jacob when I called. I went and told him, and in a moment he was a ft

her. The tall, dark gentleman has sent me about other commissions, which I will tell you if you will come directly to me, where I shall be until dark, opposite la Comtesse de Cressy's house, for that is where I keep watch."

"Gracious powers!" exclaimed Henriette, "what can this mean—surely no harm to Paula! What is to be done? I must see Henri; *he* only can act in this."

She hastily rang the bell.

"Tell some one," she said, "to go immediately to Monsieur de Rouvray's, and say I must at once speak with him. Stay! I will write."

Hastily seating herself, with trembling hands she wrote two notes. One was to Henri:—

"Come immediately, dearest Henri, to

"HENRIETTE."

The other to Paula:—

"Dearest sister,—Do not on any pretext leave home till you see me—not even over the threshold of the door."

“These,” she said, “take immediately to their addresses, and my carriage in an hour. I shall have seen Henri by then,” she thought, “and will go to Paula.”

CHAPTER XII.

HENRIETTE in vain endeavoured to collect her thoughts. The events of the morning had completely unnerved her, and she paced the room in wild agitation, not knowing what steps to take. At one moment she was on the point of seeking Manette for advice; then, though with every confidence in her affection, she doubted her ability to serve her. Just as she was leaving the *salon* to seek her room, a voice in the ante-chamber struck her ear. Could it be her aunt? and at that early hour? She flew forward to ascertain the fact. The door was thrown open, and the Comtesse entered in evident agitation.

“ You here, Madame ?” was all her niece

could utter ; she felt that something extraordinary was impending, or had taken place.

“ Yes, as you see, and ill enough I am with all this worry—your servant tells me that Paula has not been here ?”

“ Paula ?” cried Henriette in terror. “ Paula, is she not with you—at home I mean ?”

“ No, certainly not, or I should not be here at this untimely hour ; not two o'clock yet ! This comes of your horrid English customs of young ladies going out with only a servant. If I had never let her from under my own eye, this would not have occurred ! I'm a wretched, ill-used woman ! so every one says.”

Henriette for a long time vainly endeavoured to arrest her aunt's querulous outpourings.

“ But Paula,” she asked, “ where did she go ? when, and how ?”

“ How can I tell ?” snappishly answered the Comtesse. “ I dare say she's wandering somewhere alone with Monsieur de Brissac.

Think of the inconvenience of such a proceeding! should any one meet her, what will they think of me, poor wretched me; dragged out of my room to look after girls who actually are nothing to me. An English mother, the children of a *divorcée*! scarcely born in wedlock! half of you born in England." (In the confusion of her mind, caused by her loquacity, she counted the twins as one.)

"By whom were you informed of all this?" inquired Henriette, in agitation, having thought it a secret from her aunt.

"By Amélie, of course; that treasure to a poor solitary like myself, knows everything, and feels for me. I must look hideous," she cried, altering her tone, and rising to look in the glass, "all this agitation is killing me. I shall be old before my time! I knew it! I am ghastly and wan!"

And she dropped into her chair again, looking as well as ever, and with the bloom of youth, as imparted by Messrs. Chardin and Co., on her cheeks.

"Pray tell me about Paula!" implored Henriette, scarcely articulately.

“How can I tell you what I don't know? Send for my *valet de pied*—Raoul; he is below with the carriage; he can tell you more than I: he accompanied her.”

Henriette ordered the man to be sent up. In preparation for the interview, the Comtesse, with her face puckered up into a ludicrous resemblance of grief, sat arranging every finger of her well-fitting glove, and then satisfactorily surveying them, placed them on her knee, with the four corners of her embroidered handkerchief, perfectly arranged thereon, and held *au milieu* in the delicate palm; and thus she was prepared for any cause of sorrow which Raoul's history might bring to light.

The man entered; he was really concerned, and looked pale.

“Madame la Marquise,” he said, in reply to Henriette's questions, “Mademoiselle de Rouvray left home at eleven, attended by me. Mademoiselle was coming here, so her waiting-woman told me. On her way she entered the *Magazin à l'Aiguille d'Or*, where

Mademoiselle always buys her tapisseries. I waited outside. As I stood there, Monsieur de Brissac came up, and asked whether Mademoiselle de Rouvray were in the shop? On my replying in the affirmative, he made a step forward as if to enter; then turning back, said, giving me a book he had in his hand, wrapped in paper, 'Raoul, take this immediately to the address you will see on it, and then come to the Tuileries, the terrace near the quay. Mademoiselle and Madame sa sœur will accompany me there. Don't mistake.' Monsieur had so frequently met and walked with Mademoiselle before that that I thought it no harm to leave them," continued he; "but when I returned from the Rue de la Paix, where the book was directed, I could not find either Madame la Marquise, Mademoiselle, or Monsieur de Brissac, aux Tuileries. I asked several persons, describing Mesdames; but in vain. After waiting an hour, I ran here. Madame had not left home, the *concièrge* said, neither had Mademoiselle de Rouvray been here. I then hurried to

l'Hôtel de Cressy, but without more success. I walked through the Luxembourg, then returned to the Tuileries ; but all has been in vain. As Madame sees, I could find no trace of them ; yet I asked several persons."

"Did you go to the Magasin à l'Aiguille d'Or ?" inquired the terrified Henriette.

"Oh, oui !" Madame and Mademoiselle had left with Monsieur de Brissac long before ; but they had not noticed which way."

"It is most distressing," exclaimed the Comtesse, patting first one eye and then the other with the centre of her handkerchief, which, however, imbibed no moisture from the contact. "There, Raoul, you may go !"

The man bowed, and withdrew.

Henriette's tears were silently rolling down her cheeks.

"Pray don't cry !" said the Comtesse, forgetting that she herself had been affecting to do so. "There is nothing which marks the face like tears. And you are already

scarcely to be recognized. Remember, a young wife with an old husband"—she lowered her voice—"should ever be more anxious to look well in his eyes than if he were young; for he will always leave more to a woman whose beauty has pleased him to the last than to one he is indifferent about. An old man cannot expect to live as long as a young one: two young people die together—I mean, fade together; and who will be the survivor is always questionable. But, in the course of nature, the General will soon go; and though you have settlements, still much is in his power. And a man now has so many temptations and ways to perpetuate his name: missionaries here, and churches there,—to say nothing of clothing the naked blacks, and buying up Chinese children at ten francs a-head, to educate and make Christians of them, as all the charitable are doing just now in Paris."

Henriette could not reply, but paced the room in agony.

"I am sure," continued her aunt, taking

up the thread of her harangue, "I called upon Madame de Verneuil the other day, and found her in ecstasies over a letter she had just received, allotting her her tenth child! And what she will do with them all, if they are sent over, I cannot imagine. Ten children, with little cramped feet, no hair on their heads, only a long tail behind, noses without bridges, and long, narrow eyes! They'll be monsters!"

After a moment's silence,—

"Well, I really must say," she added, "that my niece Paula's conduct is most inconvenante; and pray don't walk up and down the room like that, Henriette: you make me quite nervous. You are like the laughing hyæna in the Jardin des Plantes! —I mean the Comte de Mornay's present, with only three legs, the other having been shot off!"

The door at this moment burst open, and Paula, pale and disordered, rushed in. She flung herself wildly on her sister's neck, who clasped her convulsively, the tears falling on her bosom as she lay there.

“Save me,” she sobbed with a shudder. “Save me from him, Henriette; he is coming—he will tear me away. Oh do not loose your arms: keep me with you!”

“Really,” said the Comtesse, with an aristocratic elevation of the eye-brow, her previous nervous excitement giving place to anger, “this is most scandalous treatment; rushing about Paris alone, and in this state! you may remain now where you are; I never receive you again into my doors!”

“Pray, oh, pray do not scold her,” implored her sister. “Poor child! see how she trembles,” and seating her on the ottoman, she took her place beside her, hiding her pale, terrified face on her bosom.

“Perhaps you will tell us where you have been, Mademoiselle?” inquired her inquisitive aunt, for curiosity alone prompted the question.

“He forced me into a carriage,” said Paula, scarcely audible.

“I am not at all surprised! What man could respect a girl who walks out alone

with him! Of course he will never marry you now."

"Heaven forbid he should!" exclaimed Henriette."

"Well, settle it between yourselves! I have done with her; let her be a nine day's wonder, if she please; I will be no party to it."

"She will remain with me," said Henriette, with decision, "my home is hers. Lie still, little sister, lie still," she whispered to the shivering girl in her arms.

"Amélie told me how you would all treat me!" exclaimed the Comtesse, rising, "and I find her words too true!" And she sailed majestically from the room.

"Tell me, darling, how it happened," said Henriette, when they were alone. "There, look up; no one is here; you are safe with me; look up, darling."

"He," cried Paula, shuddering, "followed me into a shop, and—purposely I think,—sent Raoul away. When he came out, his manner was so unembarrassed, it quite disarmed me of all suspicion. What

could I fear? he said the man would meet us in the Luxemburg, and spoke of our going to see you,—we walked on. He then alluded to a conversation he had had last night, and implored my pardon for what he called his mad impetuosity; then he spoke hopefully of gaining my father's consent,—all this to lull my suspicions. That man must be very base, sister," she whispered with a thrill of disgust, "for he plays on our noblest feelings for his own ends."

How Henriette rejoiced to hear these words; but she feared to give utterance to her satisfaction—she only pressed her sister's hand.

"When we were half-way across the Luxemburg towards here, he suddenly stopped, and looking at his watch said, "is it not rather early to call for your sister? I was going to ask you some day to do me a favour, Paula; will you do it now?" What is it?" I asked.

"Why, you know, dearest," and he looked down, mournfully; "many looked coldly upon me,—many of those whom I served.

There is one, who has ever been a gentle friend and too proud to accept a favour."

"Of whom are you speaking, Melchior?" I asked.

"Madame Lagrange,' he replied; 'she has ever been the same: though so humble a friend I greatly esteem her. And then, Paula, to her I owe that dear miniature whose glances urged me to the step which has won you, at whatever loss.'

"Every word of that dreadful interview," said Paula, interrupting her story, "is graven like fire on my brain."

"What would you have me do?" I inquired.

"Come with me, and see and thank her; she will esteem it as her best reward.'

"Oh, most willingly,' I rejoined, turning towards the Rue Jacob.

"Not there, darling,' he said; 'she has moved to the Faubourg;' and he pointed to the right. He had asked me some days previously whether I had seen her lately. I replied, 'Not since I sat for my miniature.' Without the slightest suspicion I

turned off towards the Faubourg. You know that long, dead wall skirting the gardens? We walked the length of that, to the new quartier beyond. He was so kind, so like all I had loved in him, that I did not notice the distance. We came at last to an almost deserted neighbourhood. I stopped. Something then flashed like a fear across me. "'Tis too far,' I said; 'I will not go to-day.' 'We have arrived,' he replied, suddenly turning the corner of a street.' I just remember a carriage standing there. A hand was on my mouth; some other men, too, hurried me forward; and in less time than I now tell it, Henriette, I was beside him, and that carriage in motion. I remember he tried to soothe me. I saw a man pass—I screamed. He, with a desperation I could not have believed him capable of, stopped my mouth. The rest I can scarcely tell you, my terror was so great. I heard a voice calling to the driver; the carriage was forcibly stopped. The door burst open, and I found myself in the arms of—of—" her voice shook—" of Edgar.

There were loud voices : I was nearly fainting. I saw Melchior forcibly held by Edgar, after he had placed me in a *fiacre*, in which, apparently, he had followed us ; and speaking to the driver, it drove quickly off with me. I scarcely know how I arrived here. Every instant I dreaded hearing the carriage stopped by Melchior's voice ; but I am safe. Oh, thank Heaven !" And she buried her face on her sister's bosom.

" And Edgar ?" asked Henriette.

" When last I saw him, was struggling with that fearful man."

" Oh, thank Heaven you escaped !" exclaimed Henriette. " What could his intention be ? He could not have proposed carrying you away ?"

" No, I think from what I collected, that he had prepared some place for my reception, thinking thus to force my father's consent."

" You will never see him more, will you ?" asked Henriette, trembling for the reply.

" See him ?" exclaimed Paula ; " see a man base enough to heap falsehood upon

falsehood for a bad purpose, and leading us astray by our best sympathies? Oh, no! my sister; a girl may forgive much, but a deliberate untruth, so systematically persisted in, degrades a man for ever in her eyes. I can only despise him!"

"Oh thank you, my own sister, for that dear assurance! Now all may be well!" Even as she spoke, a cold shudder came over her; she thought of Howard Waldron, and her fears.

"You are suffering, Henny," cried Paula, now her own loving self again. "What has happened?"

"Nothing, dear." And Henriette's eyes fell. "Nothing; it is but the recollection of so much misery. May all pass away, and a clear sky once more shine over us. May those who love us well and truly be rewarded; and those who would have betrayed, or wronged us, know repentance before they meet death!"

"Amen! to that," answered a deep tone.

They both started—the General stood at the door.

CHAPTER XIII

OVER Henriette's face there passed an unmistakable look of satisfaction. In her desolation of heart she naturally turned to that sacred tie, where she sought to have met comfort and support. When the marriage with the General was forced upon her by circumstances, she called duty to her aid to enable her to become a good wife ; but so loving was the heart nature had endowed her with, that that feeling would have warmed into affection, had he permitted it. And he loved her deeply ; but his evil passions were too fearfully worked upon by the wretch Amélie. Henriette his, and loving another, was despair to his soul : it made a demon of him.

Even he read her feelings aright, when she exclaimed, "I am glad you have returned, but you cannot have gone to Fontainebleau and back?" (As she spoke, a thought crossed her mind that she would confide all to him concerning Vesey, and get his stronger judgment to act for her.)

"No," he answered, looking kindly, and disarmed of suspicion, in her face, as he approached. "I remembered so much to do here, that I turned back less than half way. Ah Paula," he said, smiling, "I am glad to see you here."

"I have much to tell you about her," continued Henriette. "I am delighted you have returned. You will go to Fontainebleau some other day, I suppose?"

His self-possession seldom deserted him, but that ominous speech caused him to start. This then was the cause of her being pleased at his return. She was unable to see Vesey that day, but might on another.

"Possibly I may," he uttered ; a gloom, half sorrow, half indignation, crossing his countenance.

“Are you ill?” she asked, taking his hand.

“No,” he abruptly answered, withdrawing it, “no, not ill—perhaps you wish me so, that you ask it?”

“Heaven forbid!” was the reply. “Why should you think so?”

“Only, that women have many odd ways of expressing their hopes.

“I am certain Henny never said what she did not think,” exclaimed Paula warmly.

“Well, you ought to know her,” and he looked from one to the other. There was an atmosphere of truth around them both, to which he involuntarily, and not unwillingly paid homage. His brow cleared, and drawing forward a chair, he placed himself between them.

“Now tell me,” he said, taking his wife’s hand, which lay contentedly in his. “What is it you have to say about Paula?”

The girl looked down in extreme and painful embarrassment. Henriette as briefly as possible, related all.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, delighted; “I should think he would quit Paris. And now, Paula, that poor young Andriot may hope, I suppose? You owe it in gratitude to your preserver. But how came he there? You really must have pity now, having proved de Brissac so base.”

“Edgar?” she cried, looking up with a rigid horror on her countenance. “I marry Edgar? so good and pure a heart as his to be cast away on a creature, a weak, sinful creature like myself! For my infatuation for that man was sin, considering what he had been. No, I never will even see Edgar willingly.”

“You cannot be serious?” he asked.

“I am, more—I am determined.”

Henriette pressed his hand, significantly. “Say no more now,” she cried, “the subject is too painful to the poor child after her recent alarm; leave all to time,” and her own voice trembled. “And now tell me, what does this letter mean?”

She drew from her pocket the *commis-*

sionaire's. He read it in surprise, and then answered :

“ He was a man, I will candidly own, whom I employed to watch the Abbé ; I must see him : he may tell me more of this,” and he arose.

The excitement of the foregoing scenes had for awhile banished the affair of Howard Waldron from Henriette's mind. Now it returned in its full force : her cheek blanched, and she looked down in painful thought.

“ What are you dreaming about ?” asked the General, hastily, and fixedly regarding her. “ I noticed as I stood at the door, how sorrowful you looked—has anything occurred ?” his former suspicions awoke.

“ No, no,” she hurriedly replied, “ that is, I have something to worry me, it is true ; but I cannot now tell you.”

“ Then you can tell me ?”

“ Assuredly ; why not ? but not now ; it requires reflection.”

“ Then I leave you to reflection. I must see this man.”

As he was turning away, a sudden thought possessed him that he had been harsh to Henriette. He was not certain of anything against her, more than imprudence, and as he thought that might be explained somehow, he argued as his wishes prompted him, and returning, stooped to kiss her forehead; she looked up and faintly smiled. He left the room happier, and she too felt lighter at heart.

“You won her against her inclination,” whispered his *good* genius to him, as he walked towards the library; “perhaps you have judged her too severely; she certainly was glad of your return; she may have wished to see him to break off all hopes encouraged—no, engendered before marriage. Perhaps she does not love him now: if indeed he has gained her affections, then all is lost! but she may not! try and win her by kindness.”

With the last words, he opened the study door. There sat his *evil* genius, Amélie.

“I knew Monsieur,” she said, “would excuse my waiting here for him. I heard

he had returned, and having something immediate to communicate, came hither."

His brow contracted ; the good spirit had left him at the door of that room. Not one word or act of that morning was left untold. Manleigh's visit, her fainting—it was supposed, at the intelligence concerning Vesey, probably imagining him worse than she had previously been led to suppose—and then the fatal crumpled letter. He read, and re-read every word—no longer could there exist a doubt. She loved, and must have avowed it, when such a letter could be addressed to her. Not a word passed his lips, except, "it is well" as he folded and placed it in his pocket-book. Amélie rose. "Monsieur has nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing," was the reply, "you may go!"

"Should I hear anything more, I will lose no time."

"I think you will hear nothing more—go!" and as the door closed he sat down in deep and bitter thought. In a few moments

he rose, and hastily writing a note, rang his bell.

“To Madame la Marquise,” he said, as his valet entered.

Shortly after he had left Henriette’s *salon*, Henri entered in alarm at his sister’s hasty note. This gave way to the most fearful indignation when he heard about Paula’s narrow escape. Execrations and vows of vengeance burst from his lips, coupled with de Brissac’s name.

“Leave him to his fate, my brother,” implored Henriette; “our dear sister is safe; you cannot touch an unarmed man; against you he will direct no weapon.”

“Base coward!” exclaimed Henri, “dastardly wretch! he wars with women!”

“Hush!” entreated Paula, grasping his arm. “For my sake—for what he was to me—do not make him worse than he is. He is a brave man!”

“If,” he cried, with indignation, “I thought you still loved him, Paula, I would shoot him as a dog, even though he stood unarmed against me.”

“She does not—I am sure she does not, Henri; it was infatuation from the first,” urged his elder sister.

“Let her prove it, then, by returning to poor Edgar; then I will believe her.”

“Do you think, Henri,” said Paula, “that I would degrade Edgar—one so noble and generous—by offering him a heart where, for one moment, so infatuated a passion existed as mine for Melchoir de Brissac? No, I revere the memory of my pure love for Edgar; but there is but one home on earth for me, for peace, for forgiveness, I hope, and for rest,—my father’s heart! I will return to Des Ormes.”

“May heaven bless your homeward path!” cried Henriette. “I did not like now to name that; but you are right, Paula,—right, dear sister. Go, and comfort our poor, sorrow-stricken father. I would to Heaven that my mother might accompany you!—but I fear it is vain to hope.”

“And is Edgar, that noble fellow, to be made to suffer for the faults of a villain?”

cried Henri. "He loves Paula; why should she condemn him to misery?"

"You are in error," said Paula; and a blank look of trouble overspread her face. "Edgar does not love me now—I do not think he ever did."

"What can you mean?" asked Henri.

Henriette was pale and silent.

"This, Henri; that in my infatuation for De Brissac I had treated Edgar with an indifference which at length opened his eyes to his own heart. I left his letters unanswered—unopened: it was only last night I had courage to read them. I saw then what he said was true. Before he knew aught about my fatal passion for Melchoir, he had himself written to me, cancelling our engagement. He saw my coldness; he examined his own heart, and then found he had never really loved me. We had mutually mistaken our hearts;" and tears of regret and repentance rolled down her cheek.

"Oh," cried Henri, "it was wounded

pride which spoke thus ! I must seek him, however, and learn how he so opportunely rescued you, my own little sister, to-day." And tenderly embracing them both, he quitted the room, resolving to seek everywhere for De Brissac.

"He had just quitted the *salon*, when the General's note was placed in Henriette's hand. It merely said,—

"It will scarcely surprise you,—my resolution to take you to-morrow morning to my estate in Brittany. I have given orders that all should be prepared for our departure. until then I command you not to leave the house, neither shall any strangers be admitted. It is time I should place a guard over my own honour, which you seem resolved to debase. Your mother and sister can make my *hôtel* their home, as long as they please. It were better the latter—though weak, still an innocent girl—should be removed from your influence.

"DE LA VALERIE."

The letter dropped from her hand. Paula



seeing her turn deadly pale, grasped her arm. "Sister, dearest sister, what has occurred?" she cried, in terror. Henriette made a violent effort and stooping, she raised the letter. "A note from the General," she replied, scarcely articulately. "It is a mistake: wait here, I must see him, then you shall know," and with forced calmness, she quitted the room.

He was seated by his table, leaning his head on his hand in deep and gloomy meditation. When she entered the library, he started as from some fearful vision.

"May I ask," she said with an unfaltering voice, "whether, when you wrote this letter you were in your sober senses, Monsieur de la Valerie?" She held it in her hand.

"Can you doubt it? or rather you might doubt my preserving them, when I tell you I know all."

"And" she said, imagining he had discovered the relationship between Vesey and herself, which she had intended revealing to him, after an interview with that brother, "and knowing all, you blame, and not pity."

“Am I mad!” he exclaimed, rising in a wild, ungovernable rage at her coolness, “or dreaming? I might have pitied you, had you loved before our marriage, and struggled to subdue that passion afterwards; but when I find that not only on our wedding-day was that man, that Vesey, brought into my house secretly, but that yesterday you wrote, appointing a private meeting to-day; when I hear that to-day his emissary visits you, pandering to your guilty passion, by letters such as this—” he held up Vesey’s, which he had been again reading. “Well, then, what conclusion but one must I—can I—come to? You dare stand before me, and ask whether I preserve my senses? I warn you,” and striding towards the terrified girl, he grasped her arm, “that they are shaken; and woe to you if they become desperate! May heaven have mercy on you, then!”

“I most solemnly aver!” she protested, looking towards heaven, “that in deed,

even in thought, I am innocent of wrong to you."

"And you dare perjure yourself thus?"

"I dare aver more!" she cried; and now she recovered her self-possession, "I dare glory in my motives for seeking Lord Vesey. To-day, I cannot name them—not in your present excited state; but this, I owe it to myself and others to say, that, compassed by these suspicions, until I can clear myself, I refuse to quit Paris. If I owed you a wife's obedience while you were just, I owe none to oppression; and I owe a duty to my mother, the right to protect and watch over her, as accorded by you, before our ill-fated marriage, else I had never consented."

"Then you refuse to go?"

"I do positively refuse now. What I may do when others are provided for, is different; but it is due to my honour, which is yours, not tamely to submit to degradation and infamy." She stood proud in her uprightness.

He glanced round the room—his eyes wandered over every part of it. Driven to madness by jealousy, there was murder in his heart. What he sought, whether a thing of fancy or tangible, was not at hand. He sank, overcome, in his chair, and groaned aloud. She turned, and without another word quitted the room. As the door closed he started from his stupor, and laughed aloud. "Poor fool!" he cried, "I would have saved her."

Henriette reached her own room with difficulty, and then the too-tightly strung nerves gave way to violent convulsions; and long she lay in that agonized state. Paula, her mother, Manette, all failed to soothe her. The medical man tried every remedy; but the proud and noble nature, wrought up to distraction, baffled them for hours. The General never even sent to enquire after her, but sat alone, with a hell in his breast. Every convulsive shriek he heard, seemed as a tongue proclaiming her love for another, for he fancied that the agony of

separation from Vesey was the cause of her anguish.

Late in the evening she became more composed, though weak and ill. Paula was all anxious affection. With the darkness removed from her mental vision, all her pristine attachment towards Henriette seemed to revive, so true is it, that a sinful passion pollutes and degrades every better sentiment. Edgar had been; but Henriette felt too much bewildered to ask him concerning the events of the morning.

She lay reclining on a couch in her dressing-room that evening, pondering how best to act, how to see and question Vesey, when the door gently opened, and her husband entered. It might be the reflection of the fire light, but to her imagination there was a ghastly pallor on his countenance, which made her almost start up in terror.

“Do not be alarmed,” he said calmly, and his voice was bland and equable, “I come in all kindness to inquire after your health.”

"I thank you," she said in a faltering tone; "I am better, much better," and she sank back.

"I rejoice to hear it ; you have been very ill ; I did not venture to intrude before."

"Those who come in kindness never intrude."

"Thank you, I will accept that as applied to myself. I do come in kindness." He raised his eyebrows, and a look of deep sorrow and regret passed over his face ; it was gone, however, in a moment.

"Then you are better ?" he again asked. "Is your medical man attentive ? what is he giving you ?" and he raised a phial from the table.

"Madame is taking a composing draught," answered Mélanie, who had entered, noiselessly. He hastily replaced the phial.

"What have you there ?" he asked, pointing to a cup in her hand.

"Some riz au lait, which Madame is ordered to take ; she has eaten nothing to-day."

"Nothing ?"

“Nothing, Monsieur le Général.”

“You seem to keep the animal fasting too,” he said, pointing to Gem, who had risen from his rest at Henriette’s side, at the sight of the cup.

“Down, petit,” cried Mélanie, “its for ta pauvre maîtresse. Won’t Madame take it now?” she inquired, humbly:—the girl felt sorry that she had been betrayed into a conspiracy against her mistress.

“No, Mélanie, presently—not now. Place it on the table beside me.”

“I fear I prevent your taking it?” said the General; if so, I will retire.”

“No,” she answered, “I will take it in a few moments. You may go, Mélanie.”

The woman withdrew, after offering to light a taper.

“I prefer this light,” said the invalid; “remain in the next room.”

Though almost suspecting Mélanie of treachery, her heart felt too much crushed to resent it, by sending her at once away.

The General rose from his chair as the girl left, and stood before the fire a moment,

his gaze fixed on Henriette's pale and altered face.

"I wish," she said, sitting up, "to speak a few words to you. I have much to tell you, but at present I am very weak. Still it will be a comfort to me, however painful the task."

"You would confess all?" he cried, eagerly.

"If by that you mean my guilt," she steadily replied; "no, I assert my innocence."

"Think," he said, sternly. "You are ill—you may die. Do not add falsehood to crime."

"I swear it, that what I have said is true," she cried, with energy.

"Then let this conversation cease here," and his voice was hoarse with emotion. "You will be rightly judged ere long, perhaps. I condemn."

"I will say no more now," she said, almost inarticulately; "I am too weak for any discussion."

There was another pause.

“I am going,” he uttered gently, in a low voice. “I have done all in my power to bring you back to virtue. But I will say no more; when you are better we will speak again.”

She did not reply; he advanced to the table.

“Forgive me,” he asked, “all you may have to forgive, as I pardon you.”

“I have never wronged you;” and she looked up all forgiveness in his face; and laying a hand on his arm, added, “Some day you will pity me.”

“Perhaps I may, Henriette — and soon. The path of duty towards ourselves and others is often a thorny one — to take and enforce” — his voice trembled. “Now I will go,” he added, hastily. “We shall meet again soon; may Heaven have mercy on us both!”

He sighed deeply as he closed the door after him. As it did so, she sank into a deep fit of abstraction, from which she was awakened by a noise beside her; it was

Gem, leaping from the table. At that moment Mélanie entered.

“ Did Madame call ?” she inquired ; there was a hesitation in her manner.

“ No,” answered Henriette.

Mélanie approached the table ; a pleased look came over the girl’s face, as she raised the empty cup. “ Ah! Madame has eaten her riz au lait. Pauvre Madame,” she added, feelingly ; “ she has suffered much !”

Her mistress, surprised at the tone of sympathy, looked towards the girl, and then seemed about to say something else, but changing her mind, merely observed, “ I have not touched the riz au lait.”

“ Qui donc ?” asked the other, surprised.

“ Possibly, Gem ; he was on the table.”

“ Mauvais chien!” cried Mélanie, seizing him, “ You shall go out of the room for this ;” and, taking him in her arms she put him on the landing, and closed the door. She returned in astonishment to her mistress.

“ Monsieur le Général is outside,” she whispered, “ in a deep reverie!”

Henriette did not reply ; she suspected the girl was playing some double game. A short time elapsed. The girl evidently wished to say something, but durst not. While she moved about the room, irresolute, the door, which had been imperfectly closed, opened silently, and Gem crept in.

“Te voilà encore!” exclaimed Mélanie, endeavouring to seize him.

“Leave him!” said Henriette, coldly. And the little animal, hearing her gentle voice, sprang on to the couch beside her. Her hand was buried in his curls, her mind in thought, far, far away ; when suddenly the dog gave a bound, which made her start, then another, and a prolonged moan.

“What ails the animal, Madame?” cried Mélanie. “I think he is ill.”

Gem howled, aloud. Henriette started up in her bed in terror. Mélanie’s eyes met hers, and involuntarily both glanced at the empty cup. As they did so the dog gave another howl of suffering, and, leaping from the sofa, writhed some moments in agony, and then fell dead !

Henriette uttered one loud, uncontrollable shriek of horror. At the same moment Mélanie raised the dog in her arms—the tongue protruded, black and swollen.

“Pauvre petit,” she whispered, and a cold sweat of fear stood on her brow. “Poisoned! il a mangé le riz au lait!” There was a volume of suspicion in those few words. “Oh Madame!” she added, dropping on her knees in agony before the statue-like Henriette, “Forgive me; Amélie urged me to betray you. I knew not why; I knew not all I was guilty of; but of this, Heaven be praised—this heavy sin lies not on my conscience.”

“Rise,” whispered her mistress, with pale lips, “I forgive you. Let none know of this, as you hope for pardon! Now go, and tell the General I must see him at once.

She had gained superhuman strength for the effort.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE General entered the room a few minutes afterwards, followed by Mélanie, who would then have retired, and yet some strong impulse prompted her to remain.

“Stay, Mélanie,” said her mistress; then turning to where her husband stood, endeavouring vainly to attain the appearance of composure—for his face was contracted, and the brows knit—she added:

“You have made this girl a party to your suspicions of me; she must now remain and hear all I have to speak of.”

He merely bowed.

“Since,” she continued, “your hatred and

unjust thoughts of me have made you attempt murder"—she shuddered visibly; he started aghast. "Do not deny," she cried, "before that evidence." Gem lay on the ground. "He has died in my place. You came in seeming kindness, and with gentler words than of late, and there was *murder* in your heart."

"Murder!" he cried, starting back. "Murder! Do you imagine that I should attempt that crime—and on you?"

"Can you deny it before Heaven?"

"I can," he answered, solemnly; yet his eye quailed before hers. "But," he added, "there are wrongs which might tempt a man even to that."

"May Heaven forgive you!" she uttered.

"I again solemnly deny the crime you charge me with attempting; but if that belief will make you pause in your career of guilt, retain that belief. I will bear even that. As to Mélanie, as you have chosen to make her a witness to this accusation, and as I do not choose that such a calumny should be spread abroad, if she will be silent, I will reward her discretion, and leave *my* acquittal to time. For you, Henriette,

think, if you will, that you have escaped death—and repent.”

“Oh, Monsieur,” said Mélanie, in reply to his offer of purchasing her silence, covering her face with both hands, and dropping on her knees before her mistress, but turning from the General in horror, “more gold in this affair would condemn me here and hereafter.”

“I will bribe her,” cried Henriette, “by the best bribe to a repentant sinner—by pardon and renewed confidence in her. Rise, Mélanie; we have all of us faults and sins to pray for. I forgive. Pray Heaven this may be remitted to you.”

The girl sobbed aloud, and clung to her hand.

“This is all very pathetic,” said the General, ironically. “But I am yet to learn why you sent for me. As a witness? or only to hear this pleasant accusation against myself?”

“I sent for you,” answered Henriette, “to beseech you to pause and consider; to hear me, ere you be driven to a crime you may never be able to atone for here on earth.”

“Do you mean,” he asked, emphatically,

“to assert that you believe I would have murdered you?”

“I am bound to say the truth—I *do*—with this proof before me,” and she pointed to Gem. “Can you swear you are innocent of that animal’s death?”

He looked troubled.

“I could,” he replied, “but I choose to leave my justification to time, as I before said. If you really think it—this also I have said before—think well how near death you were, and repent. Henriette, the lesson may save you; renounce your guilty passion, and my arms are open still to receive you. I believe you have but sinned in thought.”

“Neither in thought nor act,” she exclaimed with energy; “and you shall know all soon. Only swear to me, La Valerie,—swear you did not do this thing.”

“When,” he answered, with a strange haggard look, “*you* convince me of your innocence; when you swear that all communication shall cease between Lord Vesey and yourself, then *I* will swear all which may tranquillize you. Adieu.”

He turned, and hastily quitted the room. Henriette sat a moment in thought.

“Come, Mélanie,” she said at length, hastily rising: “come with me—no one must know it. Come with me; I must see Lord Vesey.”

“Milord Vesey!” exclaimed the girl alarmed. “And if Monsieur le Général should know it?”

“I have nothing to fear.”

“Oh, Madame, I know that well; but I am only a poor servant. Forgive my fear for you. Would it not be better to wait, and take your brother, Monsieur Henri, with you? Then Monsieur could say nothing.”

Henriette considered a moment.

“No,” she replied, “that would cause delay. I know not where he is. Secure in my rectitude,” she mentally said, “I will go; I must see Lord Vesey first, and then the General shall know all. I must know that his affection for me is as pure as my own for him, before I call him brother; should so dreadful a penalty for another’s fault await me. If the contrary, he—no one—shall ever know it. I will beseech him to go, and never see me more!” And in this state of dreadful doubt, engendered by his

strange letter, she crept quietly from the hotel with Mélanie, and entering a *fiacre*, drove to Vesey's hotel.

Vesey was unable to quit his room. He was seated on the couch in a state of much anxiety from his friend's report, when his valet entered and said a lady, closely veiled, who declined giving her name, was waiting to see him. He at once suspected that it was Henriette; it is then no wonder if his face lit up, and his cheeks glowed with pleasure. When she entered he rose to meet her, as well as his accident would let him, whilst she trembled with the agony of anticipation. Her voice was scarcely audible, as she endeavoured to make inquiries about his accident.

"I have been so anxious to hear from, or see you," he said, pointing to a seat near him on the sofa. "Now, pray explain all this mystery; how very good of you to come here, and see me."

He took her hand kindly, which she could not withdraw, neither could she articulate at first, but by a strong effort, she made up her mind to know the truth at once.

"Tell me," she said at length. "Lord Vesey,

was your father Mr. Waldron, of Waldron Hall?"

"Yes," answered he, in surprise, "but for years he has borne a title. Pray, tell me why you ask?"

"I will explain presently. He was never married but once; was he?"

"Never; he married Miss Branksome—my mother—of course, who died in giving me birth. But, pray, let me know why you ask these questions; I know they are not idle. And why did my name, my letter, affect you so much yesterday?"

She looked up in his face: though he sat beside her, her hand clasped in his, his countenance was clear and manly, and honest. It was the face of a friend, and a sincere one. Henriette was reassured.

"Did you ever guess?" she asked, a sudden change both in her tone and manner, "any motive which could have caused the rupture of the engagement you formed in Italy last year?"

"Never," he replied in surprise; "why ask that now?"

"You are not without hope of removing all obstacles, are you?"

“Heaven forbid I should be, for all my dearest hopes are fixed there, though now there seems a strange cloud over them.”

He was looking thoughtfully down, else he must have noticed the almost rapturous light which beamed from her eyes, as she raised them in thankfulness; all then was purity and honour, and fearlessly she might claim his affection.

“I come,” she said, and tears of happiness stood in her eyes, as she fixed them kindly upon him, “to speak to you of one whom you have mourned as dead.”

“Dead!” he exclaimed; “I have never lost a friend.”

“Yes, you have mourned one,” she whispered, and her two soft hands were clasped over his, as the name fell gently from her lips. “You have thought a friend lost, and the best one that a child or man can be blessed with—a mother. Let me show her to you, as one more sorrowing than sinning; as one who has spent the sad hours of the long night in tears for her lost son; let me show to you your mother, Howard,” her voice sank lower still—“and *mine*. My brother!” and she raised his hand to her

bosom, clasped between her own two, as a child might press a dove fondly there.

The tears fell fast upon it, and then she raised it to her lips ; and Nature's voice gushed forth in a sob of welcome, and they talked, as two such beings might, whose affections had yearned towards each other, cast together in a cold world, with which their hearts little sympathized. And man though he was, the tears stood in his eyes, as she pleaded for that mother, whose voice she had heard raised in the dull, dark night, in sorrowing for her child — her forsaken child. Towards his mother, he acknowledged in his heart but one feeling—love—and he yearned to embrace her. And now he felt why he had been rejected as a suitor, where he loved so well.

When all had been explained, that gentle voice bade him hope—and he felt so happy now, for he was not all alone. They both thought it best, as their mother's error was unknown to Paula and Henri, that they should still remain in ignorance of it. He did not heed their love—had he not Henriette's and his poor mother's, to whom she promised him gently to break the discovery.

“ Oh, Henriette !” he cried, embracing her, one arm round her waist, “ how beautiful— how divine is Nature ! how she speaks to us, ever in love ; from her spring all lovely things to life, and it was her breath which awoke in our hearts from the first this germ of mysterious affection.”

As he uttered these last words, the door leading into the ante-chamber was thrown open, with violence. Mélanie, who was seated there awaiting her mistress, shrieked. Before a word could be spoken by either the brother or sister, the General stood before them, accompanied by two other men. Diminutive of stature as he was, the sense that he had come as an avenger, imparted dignity, almost nobility to his form. With arms elevated, and head erect, he approached the two.

Vesey’s arm was still unconsciously around his sister.

“ Ha ! Madame la Marquise !” exclaimed her husband, “ so we have proved our suspicions, have we ? See,” he cried, turning to the others, “ I offer you proof of my accusations. Ha ! Madame la Marquise,” and he drew her towards him. “ So you bring your menial as

a witness to a false accusation of murder against me, do you? and I, too, bring her here." Mélanie stood trembling and weeping for her mistress. "And the law, too, Madame, the law, to hear me proclaim you an adulteress! I charge you," he turned towards the two men, "I charge you to arrest them both! Ah! Madame la Marquise, in England they do not do things so cleverly, as your mother will inform you. You had forgotten that. But here, here, in France," and he foamed with rage, "we send such people to prison!"

"Oh! heavens!" exclaimed she, clinging involuntarily to Vesey's arm, and restraining his indignation.

"Leave the room," he exclaimed haughtily, waving his hand towards the two strangers; but they did not move.

"Milord forgets he is in France," said the General, satirically, "where the aristocratic wave of his hand avails nothing in such a cause against the law. These men remain as witnesses of that woman's shame, which even now calls up no blush to her cheek. See how she clings to her paramour."

"Hold," cried Vesey, gently releasing him-

self from Henriette, and grasping the General's arm. "Hold! Marquis de la Valerie; you will some day bitterly repent these words—this scene. Bid those men leave the room, and I will then explain."

"You have a carriage below, have you not, Messieurs?" asked the General, shaking off Vesey, and turning towards the two men. Henriette again seized her brother's arm.

"Oui, Monsieur Le Marquis," was the reply.

"Then I charge you to take that lady, my wife, to the Prefecture. Her guilt, you are witness to."

One of the men made a step forward; the other gazed on that fair creature, standing before her accuser—she looked so very fair and pale. The sense of that approaching ignominy gave her strength.

"No, on my life," she shrieked, springing forward and clinging to her husband's arm; "I am not guilty. Hear me, La Valerie; I will prove it—only not before strangers. He is not my lover." And dropping on her knees, she clasped her hands in supplication, and raised her streaming eyes to his.

He looked down: a pang of anguish passed

over his face as he gazed on the woman he loved so well.

“For her sake,” said Vesey, gently, approaching and speaking in a low tone, “I beseech you send away these men. I cannot say what I would before them; you shall then be fully satisfied, Marquis de la Valerie.” He spoke firmly, but deep concern was visible on his countenance. The men had retired back a few paces. Vesey saw this. “I entreat you to send them away,” he said, “or you will bitterly regret it.”

The General hesitated—there was something so sincere and earnest in the other’s tone—the man so looked the embodiment of truth.

“Oh,” cried Henriette, rising, and grasping her husband’s arm, “have mercy on us! for we have but just learnt what you shall now hear. La Valerie, he is my brother.”

The words fell on his ear as if they were a dull incomprehensible sound; how could that be? it was untrue—some scheme—some trick! He knew not enough of her mother’s history to connect this announcement with the rest. While yet stupified by the strange intelligence, his eye fell on a paper on the table—it was a

passport! A light seemed at once to break upon him—they had been on the point of eloping to England—this accounted for Melanie being there. He did not pause to think of Vesey's weakness caused by his accident, but shaking her from him he burst into a fiendish laugh.

“Not your dupe yet,” he cried, “I see it all. My arrival has frustrated your schemes. You would gain time to carry out your plans. If he is your brother, let him prove it before the Commissaire de Police!”

Words, prayers, or entreaties were vain, his jealousy had driven him frantic.

Henri de Rouvray, accompanied by Edgar, had just returned to the General's hotel, to inform Henriette of their vain search for De Brissac, who had broken from Edgar's grasp and escaped, and there Melanie in tears informed them of the dreadful scene at Vesey's hotel. Knowing nothing of his mother's former history, all was a mystery to Henri.

Till the examination could take place on the morrow, Henriette had been placed in an apartment at the Commissaire's du Quartier, having firmly refused to accept the offer made her of returning to her hotel under *surveillance de*

police. Her first agony past, the calm resolution of innocence came to her aid. Even the General commenced his first lesson in that bitter book, repentance. Her composure shook his belief in her guilt, and when she held out her reassuring hand to Vesey before departing, and they stood side by side, there was something so much alike in their manner, something so pure in their look, that his heart quailed within him at the question, "Can it be true?"

"Howard," she said, and her brow was serene; "I bid you keep a good heart, dear brother; be not downcast; he cannot taint our innocence—*that* must be proved!"

"Henriette—Madame," said her husband, trembling before her, "let me beg of you to return to your hotel, and if you can prove this to me—*do*. I shall rejoice; let not this go before the public, if it can be avoided, I beg of you."

"No, Monsieur le Général," she coldly answered. "I offered you proof; I implored mercy for myself and others on my knees. You have willed it so. As you have accused me before these witnesses, so let my acquittal be." Then, turning to the men, she said

calmly, "Gentlemen, I am ready. If you will lead me to some apartment for this night, and allow me the attendance of my servant:—it will oblige me."

"Madame la Marquise shall be obeyed," answered the man she addressed, bowing respectfully.

"Henriette," said Vesey tenderly, taking her hand, "I remain here under the surveillance of those whom your husband has appointed; but promise me this, dear sister, that, out of respect for that mother's name which he so heartlessly drags before the public, you never reside under his roof again!"

"Oh! it needs not your prayer," she said, and her pale lip curled in scorn; "for that, and for another fearful suspicion I bear in my heart, I renounce every tie between us!"

"Ah!" said the General, bursting forth in anger, "you will have it, will you? You drive me to it by your false accusations. We shall see to-morrow how you will prove your assertions!"

And, as she went forth, whatever her sufferings, caused by this brand upon her fame, he saw it not; and as the carriage bore her

away, in doubt once more, and shaken to the soul, he turned to the home he had, in his anger, made so desolate.

We need not detail the examination on the morrow, which was as private as possible. Henri was there, Edgar too, and last, the terror-stricken mother and Manette. There was irrefragable proof tendered and received, before which the General's remorseful heart bowed low. Not all his prayers then could shake her determination to leave him. Even this wrong she might have pardoned. We forgive many a fault which has had love for its excuse, and love's greatest and most common fault is jealousy; but in her mind was the conviction, which nothing could remove, that he had attempted her life. This conviction was the more strongly grounded from the fact, that, when Melanie returned to the hotel to await Henri's arrival, she had entered the General's room, hoping to find, perhaps, the letter she had been the means of his receiving from Vesey to her mistress—a proof she wished to destroy; and, in her search, she discovered on the table a remnant of white powder, as if it had been spilt in haste or trepidation. Carefully placing

it in paper, she next day carried it to a chemist, who unhesitatingly pronounced it a strong poison; thus, no farther doubt could exist in Henriette's mind.

She removed to an hotel, accompanied by her mother, Paula, and Henri, until something definitively could be arranged. If in this world retributive justice sometimes waits on our errors, there is ever a hand of mercy to soften the punishment when we bow beneath it. Such was the reward of patient endurance, when Madame de Rouvray clasped to her bosom the boy she had mourned so long. He was not to her the handsome man to be proud of; he was not a broken link in her chain of existence re-united; no, he was far more than these, he was her first-born, the child of her sorrow, the child who had solaced so many sad hours. She had mourned him in sackcloth and ashes, and her tears had kneaded those ashes into her very soul, in which his memory had taken root. He was to her the child who, for nearly twenty long years, had stretched his tiny arms to her from his cradle, crying "mother, do not forsake me;" And now he had come to dry those tears, and clasp those arms, grown strong,

to shield her; and the voice of manhood said, "Mother, love your son; sorrow no more; your woes are ended."

Even Paula's escape from De Brissac had been almost forgotten in the events of the last few days. The most painful anxiety in Henriette's mind, had been the certainty of Henri and Paula learning their mother's history. If in Henri's heart a feeling of less respect sprang up, it was, perhaps, engendered by jealousy of the affection that mother lavished on Howard—an affection Henri had very little prized when it might have been his. Paula seemed indifferent to everything. Her hour of sorrow had come, and the aching heart looked with abhorrence on the face which was ever before her—that of Melchior de Brissac—and which forbade her to restore herself to one whom she must never gaze upon with joy, whom she must avoid, and who would learn to avoid her.

Two days after the examination instituted by the General, Henriette and Edgar sat alone.

"It was not accident," he said, in reply to a question from her. "I had noticed for some days that Monsieur de Brissac was constantly

about the Hôtel de Cressy. On more than one occasion he had evidently avoided being seen. I had also surprised him one evening speaking to a *commissionaire* at the corner of the street—and this man I observed, too, never left the neighbourhood. All this excited a suspicion in my mind, and I resolved to watch. I was coming on that morning to seek Henri, and consult with him, when, turning the corner of a street, I observed De Brissac and Paula walking alone. I followed at some distance, having entered a *fiacre* to avoid suspicion. The rest you know, or nearly so. I was scarcely prepared for the result when their carriage drove off, and had a little difficulty in overtaking them, but most fortunately I was enabled to do so, and save her from perpetual regret.”

“And the wretched man?”

“He broke from me, and, entering his carriage, fled. I could not follow. She was saved, and the rest I was forced to leave to a future occasion.”

“But you will not seek him in a hostile manner?” she asked, anxiously. “Let him meet his punishment elsewhere; he is unworthy an upright man’s notice. My greatest consola-

tion is, that Paula now looks upon him with the contempt he merits."

She glanced into his face. It was calm, but thoughtful.

"We are all so weak," she continued, "and poor little Paula had been so little used to trials (shielded as she has ever been by affection), that it can scarcely be wondered at that so young a creature could not resist the arts of a man, who was willing to sacrifice himself for her."

There was a pause. She was pleading another's cause on the grave of her own hopes, and the task was a severe one.

"I am sure," she continued, "that Paula never really loved but you. Oh, Edgar!"—and her voice grew more earnest,—“can you not find an excuse for that being who was once so loved, and who now so bitterly regrets her error? Can you not take to the heaven of your love this star which has wandered—not fallen—from its place in the sky? I am certain she loves and regrets you!"

"Henriette!" he said, solemnly, "believe this; I am too just a man—too weak a one, perhaps, myself—to dare a harsh condemnation

of another. If I *loved* Paula, I would gladly take her to my heart, and taking, forget all but our first affections. But I do not love her, and could not without pain fulfil my first engagement; her coldness opened my eyes to my mistake, and when I cancelled our ties, it was done without regret. I had seen my error: yet even then I would never have pained her by that knowledge, but in uniting myself to her, have endeavoured to keep her ever in ignorance of it."

There was a long and painful silence. Had Paula not been a sister, she might have said more, but now she could not.

"My stay will be short in France," he said, at length. "Before I leave, Henriette, I should much like to see you away from this hateful city. Are you not returning home?"

"Home!" she said, and her eyes met his; "where have I one?" The tone, the tearful expression of her face went to his heart.

"My poor girl," he fondly said, taking her hand, "you indeed merit pity." She tried to smile away his words, but her face was convulsed with the heart's effort: again their eyes met.

“Before I go,” he commenced—

“Where are you going, Edgar?”

“Away—perhaps for ever. I have made application to the Minister of War, to be drafted into some regiment in Algiers. I have no ties to bind me here, except those involuntary ones the heart forms too often for our sorrow, and such must be confided to the salutary keeping of absence—for presence is treacherous, and fraught with danger. I hope to leave soon: before I go, I would, if possible, know that you are with your father, and near my uncle, who loves you so well. Will you go there, at my entreaty?”

“I wish it much, Edgar,” she answered with difficulty; “but I dread my father,—I dread home,—I dread many things.”

“Do you dread memory, Henriette—memory of the past? Oh! by the sweet candour of your nature tell me that truly; tell me I have not read you wrongly, and that my first error, has not given rise to a second more bitter.” She did not reply, but her face was very pale. “I would not pain you; but let us in parting understand each other. I have thought over every word lately that you ever

uttered, every act of yours in our once happy days. When I first went to Algiers, it was you who kept a memorial of our parting, even though but a boy's lock of hair; it was you who renewed that recollection when I returned. And on the day we walked together, Henriette—tell me; the hopes you gave utterance to, were they for another, or —”

“Oh! do not in pity try my heart thus!” she cried, rising hastily. “Go, Edgar, go; it must be, and I will promise you to seek my father. He cannot reject me now in all my sorrow!” She paced the room compressing her hands together in keen mental suffering.

“Promise me, Henriette,” and he followed and enclosed those hands in his, and his eye beamed with rapture, though the tones of the voice were sad and low; “Promise me, that when I am away in my loneliness, you will walk where we have wandered together, and recalling the absent, feel, that his bitterest sorrow,—the bitterest he can ever know,—has been the treason of his own heart, which lost him you!” She could not speak, still less, look upon him: she shook under this last fearful trial. “I go,” he said, “and we may never meet; to-day I return to Lyons; from thence,

as soon as my exchange arrives, to Algiers. And when you see my poor uncle, love and comfort him: love him, who so well loves me, and in that community of love, our affections will become hallowed. Heaven bless you, Henriette!"

Some few days after, Henri and his sisters left Paris for Tours, where Henriette and Henri were to remain. Paula preceded them, sorrowful and alone, to Des Ormes. Before leaving Paris, however, they wrote, requesting permission to pay their parting visit to the Comtesse. She declined seeing Henriette, on the plea of her opposing all her wishes, and now disgracing her, by the separation from the General. Of Henri, she said nothing; Paula, she cordially invited, naming an hour for her visit. When she arrived, accompanied by Henri, her reception of him was chilling in the extreme, and to Paula she commenced an outpouring of her manifold miseries.

"No woman," she said, "was ever so unkindly treated as I have been. You all came to my home, were well received, and to this house you have brought annoyances of every description."

"Well but, my dear Madame," said Henri,

resolved not even by a term of endearment to offend her ; “ Has it been our fault ? What have we done ? ”

“ Opposed me in all things,” she briefly replied.

“ You forget,” said Paula, “ that poor Henriette’s marriage pleased you ! ”

“ Yes, certainly ; but she didn’t do it with that intention. I have little to thank her for ; and now she has cast an everlasting scandal on me, on all her family, by leaving him. I am sure she might have been as happy as the day was long with the dear man, for he himself has told me, he had expressed much regret for that dreadful affair at the Commissaire’s. She ought to return to him, unless there be some other motive which I am ignorant of. I do feel there is a mystery.”

“ Whatever it is,” said Henri, warmly ; “ I am sure dear Henriette cannot do wrong ; we know no other cause—that one we consider all sufficient.”

They neither of them knew their sister’s dreadful suspicion against the General, which rendered a return to him impossible.

“ Pardon me,” said his aunt coldly, “ but I

was addressing your sister. Allow her to reply."

"I can only echo Henri's words and thoughts," she observed."

There was an embarrassing silence, broken by the Countess, saying :

"And even servants are taught to annoy me. I sent this morning early, thinking the subject a painful one, perhaps, for Henriette to enter into, to request the presence here of her maid, Mélanie; of course knowing she could be no stranger to all the recent circumstances; and what reply do you think she had the audacity to send?" She appealed to Paula.

"Possibly that she would not come," answered Henri, something of the old mischief in his glance.

His aunt drew herself indignantly up, not condescending to reply.

"I ask *you*, Paula," she said haughtily.

"I really cannot imagine. But nothing disrespectful, if the message was correctly delivered to you, I feel assured."

"Do you? Do you call it respectful in a servant to say she cannot enter the house with my maid—my own faithful Amélie?"

Henri fairly laughed.

“ I think these domestic quarrels highly ludicrous,” he said.

“ Henriette,” remarked Paula, apologetically, “ has, I know, forbidden Amélie to enter our apartments, and possibly may have desired Mélanie not to see her.”

“ That’s just what I wish to know,” continued the Comtesse, with anxious curiosity, lowering her voice. “ There must be some great mystery, this estrangement between the servants. They were most intimate ; and the secrecy of my relatives is, I must say, most unfeeling and inconsiderate.”

“ Rely upon it, Madame,” said her niece, “ were it anything to please you, you would be told it.”

“ Oh,” cried Henri, rising, “ if you two are going to talk scandal, I shall be off. Paula, I will call for you in an hour.”

“ What !” exclaimed her aunt, angrily, “ are my niece’s moments to be counted out to me, after all my affection ?”

“ Far from it, Madame. I imagined you would be tired of her by that time ; if, however, you desire she should remain longer, Paulina dear, I’ll come after dinner.”

“Very well, *mon neveu*,” replied Madame, more graciously, “we will not detain you with women’s gossip.”

Henri took his hat, and withdrew.

“Now,” said the Comtesse, drawing near her, “we can talk cosily. I hate a man by, when women have anything to say. I feel painfully convinced,” she continued, eyeing Paula closely, “that there must be some secret.”

“I know of none,” was the reply.

“Some flirtation, some other discovery, of which Lord Vesey was only the cloak; some private meeting discovered, on which the General generously keeps silence. He is so embarrassed when speaking of the cause, declining to take my advice to force her to explain. If she must flirt, why not have done it in a different manner? have gone to balls and *soirées*; there she could have met this mysterious lover unobserved! Not but that I highly censure this conduct; but if it is to be done at all, why not let it be done *selon les convenances!*”

“Are there *convenances* for flirting with a man after you are married?” asked Paula quietly.

“Good gracious, child, how literal you are!

What I mean is this: *convenances*, and the world's eye, should be consulted in all things. The world is perfectly willing to shut its eyes; but if we will persist in standing between it and the sun—why, it must see, you know!”

“ If it never see anything worse than it has seen with dear Henriette, its sight will indeed be clear as noon day !”

“ Ah, my dear !” sighed the Comtesse, “ you are innocent, and simple !”

“ And do you mean to insinuate, Madame,” she cried, her indignant eyes flashing, “ that my dear sister is less so? Oh, would to Heaven I had a heart as free from wrong, as she has !”

“ There, there—let us drop the subject ; I see you know nothing. And now tell me about yourself and that poor dear man, de Brissac. How much longer are you going to *bouder* with him !”

“ *Bouder* with him !” she answered in surprise ; “ surely you do not think my conduct the result of mere *bouderie* ?”

“ Of course I do ; what else ? you cannot seriously dream of breaking off your engagement ?”

“ This is a subject most painful to me,”

answered her niece, in agitation ; “ pray let us change it. But yet, before doing so, I must once for all say this—that I hope and trust never again to meet Monsieur de Brissac ! I do not seek to excuse myself ; I know how weak and faulty I have been ; but I thank Heaven I have seen my error in time. He has himself withdrawn the veil, by his last act !”

“ And pray what was that ? He knew himself surrounded by enemies, and you, by those interested in separating you ; and he took, certainly, a wrong step, but one I have learnt to excuse, to obtain your father’s consent. I am certain that, though he might have carried you off, he would have respected you as a sister. It was very wrong ; but once married, all would have been forgotten !”

“ Oh, Madame !” cried Paula, “ pray say no more ! I cannot listen to these arguments ; my heart turns against them ; they are so different to those I hear from my kind, loving Henriette !”

“ Of course ; because she wishes you to marry ce Monsieur Andriot, and I candidly tell you, if you do, I will never see your face ; on the contrary, marry de Brissac, and I will give you a handsome fortune !”

“ Money would never induce me, Madame, still less inclination, now. I have a horror of him—and more, of myself ! But do not think it is for Edgar’s sake. No, him I must never again meet !”

“ Well, it is some consolation to hear that, for I shall still hope for my *protégé*, de Brissac ; so we’ll say no more about it now.”

She did as she said, changed the conversation to indifferent subjects. Shortly afterwards Amélie entered, bringing with her a handful of wools, and a piece of tapestry. She curtsied low to Paula, who took no notice whatever of her.

“ Is this as Madame wished the colours ?” she inquired, shewing the work to her mistress.

The Comtesse looked at it a moment.

“ Dear me, no !” she replied. “ These are not the proper shades. My dear niece, I wish you would go up to my boudoir, and in the work-basket you will find the wools. Assort the proper ones, and bring them down.”

She rose to obey, and as soon as her back was turned, a look passed between Amélie and the Comtesse. The door closed on Paula.

“Is Monsieur de Brissac up stairs?” whispered the Comtesse.

“Yes, Madame, ce pauvre cher Monsieur ! he looks so ill and miserable.”

“Ah, well, Amélie, I don’t half like it ! it is not *l’usage du monde*, to permit a young lady to see a gentleman alone ; but, as you said, it was the only chance of her listening to reason, to meet him here. I am sure if she resist his entreaties to be friends, her heart must be of the very coldest. The *éclat* of having led a man to do what he did ! And then he’s rich—titled ! and I’m certain no one ever had such eyes before ; they are like a giraffe’s.”

“Shall I go and listen, Madame ?” asked the base *intriguante*.

“Oh, yes—do, pray ! and let me know all you hear.”

Paula went leisurely up stairs, in deep thought, the result of her recent conversation with the Countess. She reached the boudoir, entered, and walked towards the fire-place. An unseen hand closed the door gently after her ; the key turned ; she sprang round in alarm, and faced de Brissac.

“Treason!” she exclaimed. “I might have expected it here!” though even as she spoke, seemingly calm, her heart heaved violently beneath the hand pressed on it to still its throbbings.

“Aye, treason!” he replied, advancing; “but it is on your own heart, Paula, which would banish from it its life of love!”

“Yes, you say true!” she cried, with energy, “I have banished it. It is gone for ever!”

“Do you mean to say,” and he bent his eyes sternly on her, “that you do not love me?”

“I do not love you!” and now she spoke falteringly, knowing, or feeling the misery her words would cause. She leant on the back of a chair for support.

“Paula, you must be schooled in falsehood to say so,” he cried, impetuously.

“No, I have been schooled by experience alone, which has enabled me to form a correct judgment of myself. I was misled by an evil spirit to worship you; I was blinded by my own weakness, and woman’s worst prompter—pride. I was dazzled by you; by the sacrifices you made for me; by your fame—your appear-

ance, and I forgot myself and all worth and truth, to love you !”

“ I do not know you,” he cried, looking at her doubtfully, and clenching his hands in agony as he spoke. “ You were wont to be so gentle—so loving ! Are you changed, or have I dreamed !”

“ Both !” she answered, gaining courage with every word. “ You—*we*—dreamed a dream of sin ; I have awakened first. Do you awake now. There is but one path we may ever take together—repentance and atonement !”

He laughed aloud : the voice seemed to proceed from some mocking fiend.

“ What ?” he cried, “ would you have me turn back to the road whence I wandered, and take up the burden of existence, and bear it for years up that track, that rugged one, called Repentance ? I, who have lived for months in the sunlight of your love—renounce that day for gloom, eternal gloom and night, where I should only meet you—*meet* you, did I say ? no ! only *hear* you pass me by, an unattainable shadow in that darkness, which my grasp would ever be stretched to stay in its flight, and these

weary eyeballs strained to see! And you would call this repentance? I should term it Hell! Repentance follows Heaven. I never should inherit that; for I must ever regret, ever pine for you!"

"Hush! in mercy hush!" she said, horror-stricken, "your words cut me to the soul! Oh, would we had never met! for remorse, undying remorse, must be mine!"

"Not if you love me, Paula: there is life, youth—years of rapture before us!" He advanced anxiously to seize her hand.

"Back! back!" she almost shrieked, "or I shall go mad! Be not deceived; I have but two feelings in my heart—horror of myself, and dread of you!"

"You must be mad to say it!" he exclaimed, falling back a step. "Do you remember the past?"

"Well—too well!"

"Do you remember those averted, trembling looks of girlish love, which led me on?"

She was silent, but a sigh escaped her.

"I see you do. Sigh over them, girl; weep over them, woman; for they were traitors turning a man to damnation! By them I was

urged to a dream of passion which overwhelmed all!—religion—faith—all! Without remorse, without self-examination (*that* I would not have borne) I foreswore all my sacred vows! Unshrinkingly I bore scorn, contempt, revilings! A brave man—a man who would fearlessly have dared any death—I became a coward: struck, insulted; I bowed before the shame!—and for what? for a woman's love—a woman's caprice, were better said;—and now, when her fickle heart has changed, she talks calmly of atonement! Can I renew my priestly vows, and seek comfort there? No! Can I drink at some spring, and forget? No! You, like a minister of vengeance, would be everywhere! Repent if *you* can: *I* cannot, for I love you still!"

Paula had dropped into a chair. She could not weep, she felt too sick at heart—she was frozen with horror by his words and manner. Tall ever, he was now drawn up to his utmost height: his face of marble paleness, round which the black hair clustered in heavy masses—and the eyes, those strangely dark mirrors, showing passions the most intense, were fixed with almost a maniac expression on her. He looked the spirit before he fell—but about to fall.

“ Yes, love you,” he said, his voice sinking to woman’s tenderest tone, as when she nestles her infant to her breast, or breathes the last prayer to the dying. “ To live for her sake,” it was that loving, sorrowing, and despairing, that sad trinity hovering over a coffin ! “ Yes, love you as man never before loved, for from as high as I have fallen in loving you, so much is my passion, from its intensity, raised above the general affection of man !”

“ Melchoir !” she cried, clasping her hands, “ by that name, which I never thought to utter again, and by the sinful memories it awakens, I conjure you to repent, and struggle to forget. I will do all, anything you beg of me to do ; I will promise all woman may perform, so you repent, and not leave on my head this weight of remorse ! Oh ! I have been guilty, very guilty, but it was the result of ignorance. I mistook my own heart ; it was faithless, and deceived me ! I never loved you, or I should not have awakened from that dream with the horror I feel.”

“ They tell me,” he said, with an effort, “ that you still love another : that cannot be :

can it be? Has that affection lain dormant beneath my caresses? silent, whilst my lips swore their fiercer love to your whispered hopes? Oh, it cannot be! Love's temple would have crumbled to earth at such desecration of his altar. You did love me, Paula! you do love me! I beseech you look at me, and I will read that love in your eyes!"

"No," she murmured, raising her gaze to his face, so pale and pleading. "I again repeat, the thought of you enters into my soul with but pity, or with horror. I do not seek to excuse myself; I was a weak child; sorrow has matured that infancy to womanhood, and the woman shudders at the act of the child."

He sat, and leaning his head on both hands for some moments, seemed scarcely to breathe or live, save by the convulsive movements of the long white fingers, as they grasped his long and dishevelled hair. Paula strove to reach the door unheard; he started at the rustle of her dress; in an instant he was beside her, her hand grasped in his.

"Not yet," he whispered; "this may be our eternal parting. One moment more!"

He led her back trembling.

"Tell me," he asked, as she once more dropped into her seat, and he stood before her with folded arms; "do not hesitate from false delicacy: do you love another?—*him*?"

"I did," she answered, "and with a girl's purest love, till I knew you. Now," and her tears so long withheld gushed forth, "I dare not think of him."

"You spoke to me of atonement," he said bitterly; "shall I name your's?"

She looked anxiously on him.

"Never to meet him more; to know he lives, and loves you; to feel your soul bound up in him, as your tears tell me it does, and never to behold him more on earth. And," he sternly whispered, almost crushing her hand in his agony, "to this I condemn you, for what you have doomed me to! And as you perform this penance, to which I doom you, so will I live, and make atonement. Mine it shall be to bear with life, and drag on my heavy load of undying love for you in absence, in remorse. No, not that," he wildly cried; "I will not be false to my truest worship, my love for you! I do not reject it; were all the penalties doubled, I would bear them for the

memory of the day when I dreamt you loved me.”

Paula wept, without power to reply.

“Yes, weep, woman—weep for yourself, for me; and, oh! for our blighted days! Do you know,” he uttered in a low tone, “I had thought to die—die here before you. If you rejected my prayer, that was my then thought of revenge.”

As he spoke, he drew a pistol from his breast, and laid it beside him on the table. She uttered a cry of anguish, yet faint as a child’s from very weakness.

“But death,” he resumed, “would leave you free; and, by the solemn vows we pledged, I charge you, if you are not to be mine, whilst I live, never to be another’s.”

There was a long silence, broken only by her sobs. He sat with his deep, maddened gaze fixed on her.

“Paula, do you hear me?” he cried at last.

“I do,” she replied.

“And do you agree, that whilst I live to struggle for consolation—how, it matters not—you will in solitude make atonement for all the misery you have caused me?”

"I do," she answered; and, dropping her head on the table, burst into an agony of weeping. Her desolation was as that of one standing alone in a desert, the lurid sky above, and the drifting sand around.

"Now," he said, with the hollow voice of despair, "I go. Farewell, Paula; you have had small pity for me, yet I feel for you; else I had sooner—oh! ten million times sooner—have died, than have borne my misery: but had I done so, though I talked of freedom, it would have been an ever-coiling chain of remorse around your soul!"

He walked half-way to the door; then turning round, and facing the girl, who was looking after him in terror, he said, with a maniac laugh:

"Do not forget your last vows, as you did your first; both are sacred, though made to the apostate and accursed!"

She sprang from her chair to reach him—terror had completely maddened her. The door closed, else in her dread, her agony of what his despair might lead him to commit, she had again bound herself, body and soul, to Melchoir de Brissac!

CHAPTER XV.

HENRI had a long interview with the General previous to making final arrangements touching the departure of himself and sisters for Des Ormes. The meeting was a stormy one—threats on the General's part, and a firmly expressed resolution on Henri's to oppose any reunion with his sister.

Though her husband threatened, he still hoped that time—a few months' quiet at home—would soothe her feelings, and perhaps induce her to listen to his overtures towards a reconciliation. Now he knew it was vain to expect it. He wrote to her, and her reply, though gentle, was firm and decided. In reference to the poison found by Mélanie on his

table, she said that it had closed her ears and heart against his protestations of innocence ; but without that, the affair with Vesey had been enough to separate them.

The day of their departure arrived. Nothing could induce Paula to see her aunt again. She had been brought home nearly insensible by Henri, who in no measured terms expressed his indignation to Madame La Comtesse ; in consequence of which, a complete rupture took place between them all. De Brissac had gone, no one knew whither ; not even La Comtesse, who persisted in a belief that his body would some day be found in the Morgue.

It is time we should speak of Madame de Rouvray. It would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of her meeting with Howard ; her long mourned son restored to her from the grave, in which she had so often pictured him in her agonized imagination. It was a load of so much misery removed from her mind, that the spirit rose once again, as that pressure became lightened.

“ Her child ! ” What to her were all the others ? What to her was De Rouvray ? Those whom she had loved, and Henriette was perhaps

the dearest, were almost obliterated from her memory ; and De Rouvray—he was as of the past. Had she not dreamed ?—it must be so, for her living child stood beside her to erase all reality of suffering.

Nothing could induce her to leave Paris whilst he was there. They were as one, for his heart yearned towards a love so new, so different to any he had ever known ; still his high sense of moral rectitude made him implore her not to forsake her other children.

“ She had not forsaken them,” she impatiently said.

“ But they were returning to their father, where she could not go.” And nothing could move or change her resolution. She would sooner, had the sacrifice been exacted from her, or had it been possible, have returned to his father, than have abandoned her watchful love over that restored child ; and he, with all his strong, up-springing affection for her, had a warmer one in his heart, which day by day grew stronger.

We have said she whom he loved was in the neighbourhood of Paris ; she was residing with her parents in great retirement. Her health, never too robust, had given way before the shock

she received on being informed, that for reasons to which she was made a stranger, Vesey and herself must meet no more. In the bitterness of her sorrow, she regretted him—was he unworthy? Had he been proved so? She knew not. Duty, to her a sacred principle, enforced obedience upon her, and she bent beneath it and the forbidden reasonings of her heart, which was ignorant of all.

And day by day she grew sadder and paler. Her parents saw this and said: "Better she should be in her grave, than live with a dishonoured name."

Time crept on, and one day the father looked in his child's face, and saw death written thereon,—death and forgetfulness! She was his only one, too, and when she should be gone, what would her name be? Who would think of them—or her? Who but the succeeding heir, and who was he but a man of debauched habits—a living reproach. And then he remembered how in Italy that face of hers had smiled, and the cheek bloomed; now all had faded, and had begun to fade on the day that Vesey left.

While he thought thus, a stranger came, yet one whom we have seen before; the cold,

phlegmatic George Manleigh. Verily, there are hearts like volcanoes, only casting forth cold stones, till some great event lights them up, and they overflow with glowing fire,—such was the heart of this man. He said little to Vesey, but he saw how much that friend of his boyhood felt. He sat one evening watching his face. He had sought to smooth the lines of anxious care, and to smile, that he might thereby gratify a mother's love: but he could not blind Manleigh.

Next day, "he had gone for a few days to the country," so his valet told Vesey, and on that day he sought the proud, but not cold-hearted father of Clara Lennox, feeling assured that he should now learn the cause of his friend's refusal. Stern natures, like warm ones, fraternize. He spoke plainly and firmly too,—spoke of all the wrongs of Vesey's mother; of her almost involuntary error, and of her repentance; and then he called upon that father, "according to the fair play of this world," to give his consent, and not to arrogate to himself the right of punishing the child for the parent's sin. Mr. Lennox, only too glad to be convinced, listened, argued, and at last consented to see Vesey, with the reservation that the inter-

view should not be made known to his daughter. Manleigh was an awkward, undemonstrative man, and was seldom moved; but there was the grace which ever accompanies a good and a kind action, when he grasped Vesey's hand, and bade him prosper in his mission to her father.

When he was gone, it became Manleigh's task to explain all to Madame de Rouvray, who was absent when the latter returned from his visit of mediation. Poor Vesey, notwithstanding all his love for his mother, could not have awaited her return before he took his departure; so he bade Manleigh explain. But who could easily and satisfactorily do that to a heart which had garnered up all its love in that son? how make her comprehend, without grieving her, that she held but a second place in his affections?

Parents, in becoming such, sometimes put away youthful memories, and with them all memory of youthful affections. Even she did this, whose heart had so keenly felt them, and bitterly paid the penalty of that experience. She had relinquished all for him—should he not do so for her? She was unjust; and

when the truth was so painfully forced upon her comprehension, by his absence, she could but sit down and weep. She did not blame him, she blamed Nature and her own hard fate. Alas! she was not alone in her grief; and had she seen his, her own feelings would have assumed a healthier tone; she would have admired and pitied one who was sacrificing himself for her.

Mr. Lennox, after an embarrassing interview, consented to sanction Vesey's addresses to his daughter, on this condition: that he should relinquish all communication with his erring mother, and her other children. It was then that his noble nature shone forth; then he was worthy of Henriette's affection—worthy to be her brother.

“No,” he said, “Mr. Lennox; if I marry your child, I will offer her a man she may respect, not a wretch who could seek to win a woman of purity and honour by a base act. Were my mother a willingly guilty woman, in memory of the nourishment I drew from her breast, in memory of her sorrows, I never would forsake her; but as it is, my wife, whoever she may be, shall call her mother, and

love and respect her as such, or I could place no faith in her love for myself, or a knowledge of those sacred duties between mother and child, which, when one came to lisp her own name, it would be hers to practise.”

So saying, he quitted the house ; and when his mother hastened to meet him, his arms never clasped that poor outcast to his heart as then ; and he grew calmer, more composed, and happier, too. He had not seen Clara’s sad and altered face, it is true ; neither had he heard her sobbing cry, as she beheld him, herself unseen, turn from the door.

A few days afterwards, he again received intelligence of his father’s serious illness. What could be done with his mother ? He wrote to Henriette to meet her in Tours ; and after the most earnest prayers with which he had ever supplicated the Almighty, he had the satisfaction of seeing her depart for that child’s arms. She had an almost invincible objection to meet the Baron, or indeed even her children. It seemed to her something monstrous—the painful position of being the wife of two husbands. Spiritually, she had severed one tie by the change of religion, and the sight of the

offspring of her second marriage bowed her to the earth with shame and contrition. However, to Henriette she consented to go, and Vesey wrote the following short letter, the day before she and Manette left.

“ Dearest Sister,

“ I confide her to your care—need I say, love ? And should an event occur, which seems most probable, if you can reconcile her to re-unite a broken tie, it will give much happiness to

“ HOWARD.”

And Henriette received with outstretched, loving arms, the mother sorrowing for her son.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE are once more at Des Ormes. It is a cold, wintry night in January—the wind is whistling through the leafless trees—the large, gloomy chateau is closed—from no window is a stream of light thrown for an instant across the place: all is gloom and darkness.

In the library sat a man, one we have seen almost young and handsome; the eagle eye proud and worthy of the commanding demeanour. Can it be the same? The Baron de Rouvray? Why, this man is bent nearly double; the hair is long, neglected and grisly; thrown back from the brow, and falling in masses behind the ear, showing the many lines of care in that pale, sallow, worn countenance.

The hands, too, are thin and attenuated; and as they cast into the sickly embers, letter after letter, a sigh escapes his bosom. He opens one—it was Marie's—Marie's before she became a wife. He dwells over every line; and at last, reading a hopeful passage of future happiness, a tear steals down, and blisters the lying prophecy—for all is despair.

As he sat thus in intense thought, a pile of letters before him, the noiseless door behind opened, and a trembling girl stole in—it was Paula. She durst not advance while he read, and wept; for as he turned his head half round, she saw the tears. He could not burn that one letter; he folded it, and looked in agony at every fold as he did so. The letter had been so often read, that like a map, each fell with a touch over the other; and then he sat awhile thinking of the fingers which had made that white sheet a messenger of joy.

At last with trembling hands he placed it in his bosom.

Paula advanced a step. He took another letter from the table: it was fresh and new, unstained by time, and the characters were dark.

“Paula,” he whispered aloud, “poor little Paula.”

She crept forward.

“Paula!” he exclaimed, wildly, “oh, that was my bitterest blow! My child!”

She was on her knees beside him, grasping his arm.

“Who are you?” he cried, starting from his seat, and standing erect.

“Your child,” she uttered, her eyes streaming, “your penitent child. Oh, take her to your heart once more!” She knelt, clasping her hands as she spoke.

“Away!” he shouted, madly, “away, girl. I have no child, she forsook me—left me, cast me from her arms to fly to an apostate, an accursed wretch! and I left her, with my malediction on them both.”

“Oh, take it from me, my father!” she almost shrieked, rising, and springing towards him, “for it has clung to me. But I have cast him from me—my delusion is past. Oh! do then forgive me, father!”

“Or has he forsaken you?” he harshly inquired, pushing her back.

“No, father, no. Do not think so hardly of

me, as to believe I could seek you thus to deceive you ; I come, in sorrowful repentance to implore your mercy !”

He dropped in a chair, overcome by his emotions. Like a man kept fast in darkness for years, he trembled at the light, fearing it should fade again from his reawakened vision.

Paula crept towards him : her heart heaved with anxiety, lest he should renounce her : she was at his side, and before her quick breathing could announce how near she was to him, she threw her arms round his neck ; but the arms were powerless, and sinking before him, her head dropped on his knee, and she sobbed in wild anguish. A strong clasp stole around her, gently ; it raised her to his bosom, and there the father drew his penitent child to the breast which had ached so much to hold her there !

Long she wept, and her young tears fell, as dew from heaven to bring forth verdure, even from that wasted and blighted soul.

Oh ! it is a beautiful feeling—a father’s love for his child ! how the helpless thing grows to strength beneath that kindling sun ! How it expands in loveliness, confident in the sheltering strength and will to shield it from every storm !

That dark dull room seemed to grow glad ; the fire shot up into a cheerful blaze, and as Paula sat on her father's knee with her arms clasped round his neck, and that head pillowed on her young heart, he became another being. She had noiselessly removed the sad letters from the table, and thus they sat, and she told him all—all, as when she was wont to make her innocent confessions as a child. Even the remembrance of alienation of his Marie from them all, came less painfully to his mind than she had dared to hope. Even on Henri he was disposed to look kindly, when he heard all that he had done to save Paula, in bringing Edgar to Henriette's, unknown to any one (not even the motive, to the former, as we have seen).— All the sad events concerning Henriette were strange to him, for he had heard from no one. Now he looked on her with pity : she had been so kind to his poor Marie and Paula, and his worn heart once more opened all its pores to love.

A few days saw his three children again at Des Ormes ; but the bitter fruit, experience, had left its wormwood on the lips of all. Madame de Rouvray, too, had returned, urged

to that step by Howard's solicitations, and Henriette's prayers, when she met her in Tours; but she secluded herself almost entirely from all. There was a shame in her heart, which she could not overcome. Still, the knowledge of her presence was a joy to her husband. Some days after their return, Henri and Henriette were alone in the salon, when their father entered. It was the first opportunity he had found of conversing with Henriette touching his future prospects. After a few introductory remarks, Henri said;

"It is my intention, father, to fulfil your wishes, and study with Bruton for the church. I have been doing so for some time, in Paris, to oblige you."

"Oblige me?" cried the Baron, doubtingly, "Then why not have acceded when you were here, before your departure?"

"Because," he answered, "I then thought—forgive me, father—that your hatred of me alone urged you to press it upon me; since then I have learned, and I know better."

Henriette was flushed and anxious; she turned to conceal her confusion towards Manette, who had that moment entered the room.

“Are you speaking ironically?” asked the other. “But no, you seem serious; I really am at a loss to know what you mean?”

“He means,” said Henriette, “that your kind reception of him—your forbearing to urge—”

“No,” interrupted Henri, “it is time I should openly express my thanks to my father. I mean, Sir, your generous, though anonymous, payment of those overwhelming debts, which nearly drove me to the fearful crime of suicide!”

“This,” exclaimed the Baron, “all this is new to me! I was led to suppose those debts never existed, but were forged to extort money from me!”

“And did you not anonymously send me the cancelled bond—a bond which I had given for fifteen hundred louis?”

“Never, I solemnly declare; I deemed the whole a fabrication.”

Henri turned on his sister a deep and earnest gaze.

“Never mind, Henri,” she cried hastily, “it may have been my aunt; she is eccentric, and acts strangely sometimes.”

“No,” answered he, after a moment’s thought, “it was not my aunt, for she has been a long

time estranged in affection from me. *You must know, Henriette, for you foretold it to me, and it occurred.*"

Her cheek turned crimson beneath the earnest look of her father and brother.

"*Mon enfant,*" cried Manette, coming forward, "why should you cast a shadow around yourself and your good deeds? Why have borne blame so long for what the world deemed a mercenary marriage?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Henri, turning pale with astonishment and horror.

"*Oui, mon fils,*" answered Manette, interrupting his thought; "and you, Monsieur le Baron, take her to your hearts, and comfort her loneliness; for with the bond which freed you—" she addressed Henri—"she bound herself, and never forgot a wife's duty and obedience till he obliged her to leave him."

Henri sank on a chair in agony, with his face hidden on the table; but other arms were round her—the victory had at last been gained over prejudice and error.

"Forgive me, Henriette, my child," cried the agitated man, "forgive me; till now I never read you aright. I have misjudged you,

wronged you in thought and word. Come to your father's arms; they shall ever be your best protection and safeguard. May Heaven bless you!"

"Oh!" she said, looking up into his eyes. "Any sacrifice would ill repay this moment, for which I have yearned so many years. My dear father—"

"Henriette," whispered her brother, grasping her hand, and looking up with a gaze of blank despair, "I cannot ask forgiveness now; but you shall learn to pardon the boy, when the man fulfils what he promised that day."

She returned his earnest pressure.

"Henri," said his father, placing the trembling girl tenderly on a chair, "I have been most to blame. Against all evidence, I rejected you both; it is you from whom I ask forgiveness. In the path you are pursuing, my son, you will find happiness, for it will bring occupation, and without that there can be no real contentment. The mind feeding on itself, engenders care and repining, too often sin and sorrow—inseparable twins!"

Henriette rose, and silently embraced that repentant brother. It was a day to requite her for many woes.

CHAPTER XVII.

LE bon Père Andriot was again a visitor at the chateau, and with kind words and gentleness endeavoured to bring comfort to all. And his sister came, too, or Henriette went there. Paula avoided every one as much as possible. She was already paying the heavy penalty of error, for shame came over her at every turning in her path. There was only one person on whom she could look with composure, and that one was Bruton. Once more his place was at the Baron's fireside, not for the spiritual instruction of Madame de Rouvray, who avoided every one; but for Henri, who, without becoming sad or morose, had received so severe a shock on learning why Henriette married the General, that the boy—the wilful, wayward boy—had suddenly become changed. He took pleasure

in studying with Bruton, that he might fulfil his promise to his sister, the only atonement he could offer; and with that cold, stern man, Paula learnt to converse freely. With others, she always seemed in dread of an allusion to past events; with him, every word of his was so guarded, she knew she had nothing to fear.

All was indeed changed at Des Ormes—all were saddened. Their mother's fault had planted a canker in all their bosoms. Disunion, doubt, estrangement, had driven two children from a father's love—and who could gaze on the sad, but patient face of Henriette, and not read the despair there! She firmly refused to return to the General, from whom she received frequent letters. Sometimes he threatened force, but never going beyond threats, she was more than ever convinced of that guilt which durst not risk the chance of exposing himself to public execration.

Père Andriot and Henriette frequently talked about Edgar. The subject pained her, for in his earnestness, the good Curé spoke so feelingly of all the young soldier's blighted hopes; of his approaching departure for Algiers; of

Paula's firm refusal to see him. Alas! poor simple man, his ingenuous mind could ill imagine all the various treasons of the hearts of those who live in the world—false too often to all around, and still more so to themselves. He knew not that Edgar had been the one who had cancelled his engagement—led to it, it is true, by her coldness. Supposing him rejected by Paula, the Curé spoke of it not in anger—he was incapable of such a feeling—but in deep grief to one who held entire possession of Edgar's heart, herself bending beneath the weight of a love which she felt her heart ought not to recognize.

The Baron de Rouvray, now an altered man, ventured one day to plead Edgar's cause with Paula.

“Oh, my father,” she said, shuddering, “you little know the horror I feel towards myself. I *never* could marry him, and, moreover, he himself cancelled our engagement, and we shall probably never meet again. I hope not, indeed.”

“But Paula, my child, I would gladly see you the wife of an upright man. Edgar must love you still, and you him, for you never really loved de Brissac.”

“ I never did : it was infatuation—I was spell-bound ! But yet, my crime is as great.”

“ What crime, my child ? the sin is his, not your’s.”

“ I led him unconsciously into it. Oh, no, I never can be Edgar’s ; besides which, I have bound myself sacredly, while *he* lives, never to become another’s.”

“ But such vows are not binding, Paula ; I would fain see you smile once more, and be happy !”

“ That I do not think I shall ever be—I do not deserve it !” cried the sorrowful girl. “ In listening to that man, and uniting my vows with his—he a priest, bound by so sacred an oath to Heaven alone—I have profaned all that is holy.”

“ Hush, my child ! you judge yourself too severely. Moreover, how do you know that *he* lives ?”

“ Oh yes, father, he lives. I know it, for this very day I have had a token which has not failed me, from time to time, since I came home. Without a line, without a word to indicate where he is, this—look at it—have I thrice received.”

She took a paper from her bosom ; it con-

tained but a sprig of *Immortelles*—meet remembrance of a love like theirs.

“And from whence does it come?” asked her father.

“I do not know. Once I had been reading in the *salon*, and left my book open on my work-table, whilst I strolled down the steps into the garden. On my return—it was nearly dusk—I found an envelope, in a handwriting I too well knew, containing but a branch like this. For days I was fearful of stirring out, and spoke of it to no one. To day it came by post, showing me too plainly that I am remembered, and my promise reckoned upon. But were it not for that promise, I could not be Edgar’s.”

“I must have the grounds watched; he may be lurking about,” said her parent anxiously.

“I do not think so, father; I believe him absent, indeed at a distance.”

And at her earnest entreaty the subject was dropped, and her fond father promised to institute no inquiries, which might revive the whole affair, and soon other causes of anxiety banished this from his mind.

Madame de Rouvray was as estranged from all her family, as on the first day of her return to Des Ormes. When she met her husband,

though an evident affection breathed in her manner, still there was so much suffering evinced, that he himself now rather avoided the meeting. She remained totally secluded in her own apartments, Henriette and Manette almost her only visitors. To them she spoke of Howard, of his letters, of his return to France ; and those two faithful hearts dreaded the moment of that return, feeling that no power would then be able to sustain her from flying to meet him. There he could not come, and Henriette felt most keenly for all her father would be made to suffer. And yet she could not blame her mother. Her position was so false, so painful a one, that it was natural she should wish to escape from it to her beloved son's arms ; that son, whose name was never spoken by her father, but the thought of whom was ever before him ; in his Marie's estrangement ; in the tone of that anxious voice, which seldom met his ear, except each morning, to ask eagerly at the door of her apartment, as the servant brought in the letter-bag : " Are there any letters for me ? " Poor Marie ! she was selfish, perhaps, but she little knew the agony she inflicted in those few words. He suffered, and was silent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was a lovely morning in early April. Lured by the freshness of the air and the warm sun, which seemed as a fond parent smiling upon the peeping buds and leaves—his children springing up to meet his caresses—Paula stole out alone, to inhale the soft elastic air, which was not without its effect upon her spirits. She felt soothed and tranquillized, her troubles, like clouds, breaking to disperse. She had pursued her walk for some time in peaceful meditation; not a soul was to be seen. A thrush was overhead, singing his matins in an elm tree. She paused to listen; its melody struck upon the first chord of sadness in her heart. She was close to that walk of elms, the favourite one of the inhabitants of the château, where we have before seen Henriette, Edgar,

and herself. She thought of their last evening there together, and leaning against the tree on which the thrush still lingered, she sighed deeply. A deeper sigh echoed her's. She started, and turned round in terror. De Brissac was before her. She involuntarily receded some steps.

“Do not shun me, Paula,” he said, sorrowfully; “’tis I—yes, I, who have wandered here many an hour, praying for the one in which we might meet again. That hour has arrived. Did you think, or hope, that where you are I could fail to come? No; there is an impulse stronger than my own will prompting me to be near you, uncontrollable as my affection, stubborn as my heart, which bows, but will not break.”

She looked round, hoping to see some other living soul besides themselves—some one whose presence might be her protection. It was like sin and despair meeting, where no spirit of hope might interpose to prevent a fearful struggle for mastery.

“So you still dread me,” he said, reading her look aright. “Has that one act of mine—a prompting of love—made me seem so horrible

a being, that you can find no gentler feeling than terror for me?"

"Why are you here?" she mildly asked. "Have I broken faith with you? Have I not kept the promise I gave? Why are you here?"

"Why?" he returned, looking down upon her with a look of the bitterest anguish. "Why? Have you not heard that sometimes disembodied spirits wander near those they have loved, or wronged, when this world no longer holds them, either for solace or atonement? My punishment commences before the world severs its own from the spirit. Wherever you are, I must be near you. I have no rest left me. I wander—wander round the grave which yawns for me, but rejects me."

He looked the truth of the words he uttered. He was ghastly, and worn to a shadow; the large dark eyes were still more noticeable, from the hollowness of the cheeks. Paula was shaken to the soul, and yet too terrified to weep. Tears are as dew which moistens the earth, and renews its vigour. Remorse has none—it is a volcano, vomiting forth lava, which burns and destroys.

“ I have not sought you,” he continued. “ True, I linger ever near you, but unseen. To-day, you have come to me ; and whether in bitterness or with kindlier feelings, it little matters. You are here, and I see you.”

“ Begone,” she cried. “ Oh ! in pity, leave me. This is but prolonging my sufferings. Surely I have wept enough over my fault. Heaven may forgive !”

“ Can you forgive yourself? No. Can you see me as I am, remember me as I was, reflect upon what I am doomed to be, and hope for rest? No, Paula, I dare you to be happy.”

“ Happy !” she cried, looking upwards ; “ I am cursed ; and what can remove my heavy woe ?”

“ Pity !” he answered ; “ Pity ! She is a divine emanation. She will bring comfort, and hope, and rest to your heart, and lightness to your conscience. Woo her, Paula ; it may not be too late to redeem the past, and save a soul !”

“ Do I understand you !” she exclaimed, in horror. “ Do you by pity mean that I should again bind my soul to sin and undying remorse—to darkness here, and to eternal night ?

Oh, no! I will bear all, suffer all, as a just punishment of my heavy, but not unrepented guilt; but never again, *never* will I take up my chain—no, not even if I loved you.”

“Are you well and truly resolved, Paula? Think—reflect; you may be condemning one whose sin, however great, has been devoted love to you. Think! there may be burdens we cannot bear. Reflect what power you may hold in your hands—the power of life and death—worse than to mere mortality. Bid me hope, hope that, even in years, you will be mine. I have faith that my fault may not be accounted a sin. I was too strong in myself—there lay my error. I, a poor, weak mortal, would fain have stood erect, as a strong oak, not to bend, not to break, only to fall, uprooted! And I forgot the lightning, which can rive and blast!”

“I bid you hope,” she said, sadly but firmly, “but not in me—hope in a more stable promise than woman’s love. Be firm, and comfort will find you; repent, and peace, like a silvery cloud, will enfold you in her embrace. And we may then meet with joy—twins in happiness, as we have been partners in guilt,

and its shadow, sorrow. Go, Melchoir ;” and her voice grew steady, though tearful in its tone, from very earnestness ; “go to some other land, where my shadow may not interpose between you and Heaven, and the vows you have shaken will take deeper, truer root ; the oaths you have broken will re-unite like gold in a crucible, passing through fire, to become a chain of many links around your soul. Go, and pray for me, as I will for you, and those prayers uniting, may become a bond of peace and pardon for us both.”

“Go,” he cried, “and take up my priestly robes again? I have trampled them beneath my feet. Go, and forget you—that I never can ; for when I shall be dust, my spirit will be around you, in every sigh you heave, in every tear you shed, defying you to forget me.”

“Then,” she said, turning to go, “I can sue no more. I repent, oh most bitterly, of the past, and I hope ; do you try, for your soul’s sake, to do likewise.”

She moved quietly away. If she felt for the man, the mortal man, she prayed that peace might be rained down on the immortal

spirit. A wild laugh burst on her ear, and before it had well passed into echo, another sound mingled with it. A quick, ringing shot on the soft, sweet morning air, which wafted an erring soul's last breath from this sorrowing earth, where sin gains the mastery.

Paula sprang round with a wild shriek : Melchoir de Brissac lay dead before her. She tried to fly, but could not. And when some time afterwards, she was found by those who anxiously sought her everywhere, she was seated on the ground, with that head, whose last thought had been for her, on her knee, and with the wild and wayward gestures of an idiot, weaving her hands in the long, raven hair.

It would be a vain attempt to describe the anguish of those who discovered her ; with difficulty she was removed from her ghastly burden, and then a long, heavy swoon followed. To this succeeded fever—fever in all its horrors—its raging madness, frantic cries, and still more fearful to witness—its laughter—from parched and burning lips. And thus she lay for days, a creature hovering between life and death.

In the meantime the body of the wretched De Brissac was borne into an apartment of the château, and lay there awaiting the necessary inquiries from the authorities. The only witness who could have given any testimony was bereft of sense. It was a painful task for the others to be called upon to lay bare all that sad history, but justice required it, and they were compelled to submit. Then came a still more dreadful question—his burial. With every wish, as a Christian, to perform the last offices, Père Andriot could not. The wretched suicide had placed himself out of the pale of his church. He could not lie in that quiet little churchyard. Bruton was the only person who could inter him with Christian rites, and he refused. Bruton was conscientious in his decision, but rigid in all his observances. He preemptorily refused to bury a suicide.

In the lone hour of night a dark procession wound slowly through the lovely cemetery at Tours, and there, in a corner, apart from all, was laid that erring man, who had paid so heavy a forfeit for his sin ! The service was read by Henri de Rouvray, in the presence of his father and a few followers, who had attended more out of curiosity than any feeling of commiseration.

The pale, grey light of morning looked coldly down on that grave; then rose the sun in all his beauty, and the lark sprang on high, singing his praises for that light and warmth. The flowers on the many graves, so neatly and beautifully tended, in memory of the dead, sent up their perfume as offerings from the living to the spirits whose corruption lay beneath, and in that scene of beauty one dark figure knelt on the newly-made grave, and prayed with deep and earnest fervour for the suicide—the maniac! Night had seen him there, and the hours that brought day with them. At last he rose, and with a pale, but placidly serene countenance, Père Andriot quitted the apostate's grave!

CHAPTER XIX.

AT last Paula rose from her bed : her face had become calm and resigned ; but all joy had passed for ever. She spoke of De Brissac's fearful death without reserve. That she could do so might surprise many who know not—may they never know!—the many resources of affliction. The stricken heart must find vent, or break. There was a feeling, however, of indignation in her heart against Bruton, for his refusal to bury the wretched suicide with Christian rites. It was a feeling she endeavoured to combat ; for from the moment of her convalescence, he had been most kind, most soothing in his attentions towards her. And the man she used to ridicule in her days of light-hearted gaiety, as so austere, cold and uncharitable, she had learnt to appreciate differently.

There never was a more conscientious man than Bruton ; but his nature, though not harsh, appeared to be so.

One day he sat with Paula alone ; she was just recovering, and leaning back in a large chair before the open windows ; her eyes were fixed on the avenue where De Brissac had destroyed himself.

“ I am glad to see you better, to-day,” said he, entering, and gently taking her hand. “ Could you not walk a little ? Shall I offer you my arm ? ”

“ No, I thank you,” she replied, mildly, but coldly. “ I prefer sitting here,” and her gaze was still directed towards the Elm walk. Little as Bruton had studied those arts which please women, it would seem that he had a kind heart which upon some strong occasion would display itself. He saw her glance, and rising drew down the blind, merely saying :

“ The sun is powerful ; it will make your head ache.”

She looked up, slightly surprised ; but her woman's heart divined the motive of the act.

“ Thank you,” she said, and one slow, cold tear stole down her cheek. He seated himself

beside her, and as a father might have done, took her hand.

“ You must not indulge in these morbid fancies,” he said ; “ they are not right, neither are they healthful for body or mind.” She did not reply. “ I have wished,” he continued, “ for many days to speak to you on a certain point, which it is repugnant to my feelings to speak of. I will, however, do so now. I have felt the change in your manner towards myself since your illness. You have harboured an unjust opinion of me.”

“ Was it kind to us—was it Christian, or human, to refuse the last sad rites to that unhappy man ?” she asked, guessing his allusion.

“ Listen to me,” he replied, “ listen ; not from your personal feelings, but your reason. There are things more sacred than friendship—duties above these. I may be stern and cold, but my conscience tells me that I am right. I chose the church from inclination ; its duties have been my most earnest study. I do not think any one of its ordinances should be slighted or neglected. Lax ministers make lax followers. I have often found that by strictly

adhering to the straight path, I have been called stern and uncharitable; but I have acted from my sense of right. If we fail to show our reprehension of a sin, that sin familiarizes itself to the mind. Suicide is a deadly sin."

"But the unfortunate man was mad!" she exclaimed, in grief.

"Prove him to have been so, and I would be the first to show all the respect pertaining to my sacred office, to the being whom the Divine Creator had pleased, for his own mysterious but wise purpose, to afflict."

"You would pray for him?" she asked. "Père Andriot prayed over him through the long night, on the cold earth, though an apostate from his faith."

"And who tells you," he sternly replied, "that I did not pass that night in fervent prayer for the dead? or that in my closet, I had not passed the preceding ones in supplication for guidance in the harsh duty I had to perform? Never judge the unknown, unshown acts, or thoughts of others."

"Forgive me," she said, with humility.

"I know I am stern and harsh," he continued, pressing her hand kindly. "I was so

to your brother, once ; but I did what I now blame you for—I judged hastily. I knew not many repelling causes in that heart, which I now know. They exist no more, and he has a noble nature. But, to return to our subject. If we shewed more severely our reprehension of suicide, that fearful crime would be less frequently seen. Unfortunately, too many care more for the body than the soul. Let a man know that his body, man-gled by his own hand, will be cast into an unhallowed, unblest grave, and there would be thousands living and repenting to-day, who now are in their graves, pitied as ‘ temporarily insane,’ whilst their ungoverned passions drove them to the act.”

“ But some are mad ? ”

“ True ; but have I not told you my feeling for those ? This is one of my stern duties. I may often grieve to pain others, but my conscience approves me. I will never give a suicide Christian rites.”

“ I thank you for all you have said,” she replied, looking kindly upon him ; “ you have often consoled, to-day you have made a better Christian of me.”

“And now,” said he, “let us talk of your health. You require change.” He stopped suddenly, and then hurriedly continued. “Why not leave here? Why not visit England?”

“I know no one there,” she said, in surprise.

“I am going. Come with me; banish this care from your heart. Your error was the fault of inexperience, and an over-affection which weakened your own good heart. I often told your father his indulgence would bring sorrow to you. Come with me: I am not young; I am not handsome; but I have a sincere affection for you. Be mine; I will make you a good, indulgent husband; and there, amid fresh scenes, you will find that best blessing, peace!”

“Marry!” she cried. “I marry! and he—” she pointed in horror towards the avenue.

“I did not anticipate success in my solicitation to-day,” answered that strange, immovable man; “but you now know my earnest wishes. Think of them; I will not tease you by importunity. Let us meet as usual; I wish to return to England, and should be happy to have you as a companion—and that companion a wife.”

She sat speechless.

“Marry, marry,” thought she, “and after this dreadful event! Marry—and Edgar! But what is he now to me? What can he ever be? Did he not renounce me—cancel all? And since that hour has he ever, by word or look, been more than a brother to me? And I loved him so well—so well! My girlish heart was all his. The rest was but a dreadful dream!”

Bruton gazed on that face, working in its silent agony. To none, not even to Henriette, was it known how Edgar still held empire in her heart.

“Shall I read to you?” he asked, taking a book from his pocket. And he read—read on patiently to the sorrowing girl, not seeming to notice her, but gently persisting, until a smile rewarded his efforts.

On that day Henriette received a letter from her husband’s physician, informing her that the General had met with a severe accident in a fall from his horse, and imploring her, at his earnest solicitation, to come and see him. The letter was most urgent. Badly as that man had treated her, there was something so painful to her in the thought of death—death to any one,

but especially one to whom she had so solemnly pledged herself, and so well redeemed that pledge, despite all his unkindness—that she could not but be moved when she read the letter. With streaming eyes she sought her father, and holding out the letter, expressed her wish to leave at once, accompanied by Henri; and making a few hasty preparations, she departed, with the blessing of a parent, who had learnt so fully to appreciate her worth.

It was a most dreary journey to both of them, but at length the brother and sister arrived at the General's hotel. All was in confusion there. He had been thrown from his horse, and brought home seriously injured; indeed, they were of such a nature as to preclude all hope of recovery.

Henriette stood by the bed-side; he gazed wildly upon her, his face distorted by mental and bodily suffering.

“I am down at last,” he muttered between his set teeth—“down, Henriette, and you will soon be a young widow—a gay young widow! Think of that!” and he grasped her hand with all the force remaining to him. She was weeping silently, and from her heart. “Don't

torture me any more!" he impatiently shrieked forth, as the surgeons endeavoured to raise and examine the side, which, almost crushed in, drove the breath forth from the lungs in frightful gasps. "I tell you I am dying; I know it; leave me to myself."

The attendants drew back, shaking their heads at each other. One of them stepped forward again, and with a handkerchief wiped the dew from his brow, and the streak of blood issuing from the corners of his mouth. "You see," he cried, eyeing it, "you see I am dying; that is my life blood!"

Henriette sank on her knees beside him, and held the cold hand, each moment growing more so, in hers.

"Give him water,—something to drink," she whispered to one near her—he heard her.

"Water!" he cried shrilly. "Pure water, mind! and see that there is no poison in it!"

He tried to laugh—she sprang up; her eye dilated with horror at the reminiscence.

"Why do you start?" he continued. "There was poison once: you know you said it: Melanie attested it! Who gave it? Who gave it?" and passing his hand over his clammy brow:

"I'm wandering," he muttered, dropping back on the pillow.

Henriette was on her knees once more, and with pale quivering lips whispered in his ear : "Will you see some one, some good, holy man ? He will speak peace to you. Do, pray do, my husband !"

"No," he cried, "I will see no one, no one but you. I want to speak to you alone!" and the terrified eyes opened wide, as a fearful pang of mortal suffering warned him of the grim messenger that would bide no delay.

One by one the persons present withdrew in solemn silence. He raised his head with difficulty and looked round—

"Are all gone?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"Now, listen, Henriette. I have much to say, and little time to speak—put your face near mine. I cannot speak loud. I have been harsh to you. I know it. There, don't look so at me ; it is a bitter reproach for many things, but you cannot know all I felt from the first. I loved you so deeply—so madly—but of that one dreadful act of which you accused me, on my soul ! in this awful moment, I was innocent, even in thought !"

“Oh! may Heaven be blest for that assurance!” she cried, raising her eyes in thankfulness. “But why allow me to think it?”

“Listen, Henriette. A foolish thing—a boyish trick—one I was afterwards ashamed of. I poisoned your dog; it was Vesey’s gift. I thought you loved that man; and when you accused me of attempting your life, after the first horror, I allowed you to believe it, thinking that fear might make you renounce a guilty attachment afterwards. All was forgotten in our separation, and how acquit myself then? I had wronged you so deeply!”

There was a short silence.

“And,” he continued, “now I would have my mind relieved. I watched you so keenly—we do so when we love. I felt that your affections were engaged—I suspected it long before—to another, but they said it was Vesey, and so I fancied my suspicions were erroneous. And now. Tell me. You love another; do you not? I charge you, own all to me now at this my last moment.”

“I do,” she said.

“And he knows it? You have seen him lately?” he shrieked.

“No; I most solemnly aver I know not even where he is.”

“He was in Paris two months since, for I met, and told him you were coming back. That was some small triumph,” he muttered to himself, “to see how he winced at the information—for he believed it!”

“Oh! at this solemn moment,” she exclaimed, raising and standing beside him, “think of something more momentous than worldly triumph over a suffering man!”

“And leave you to become his wife—the wife of this lover of your sister—Edgar Andriot! You start! I know I was right!—his wife when this body shall be dust!” he cried, in agony. “No, you do not know what it is to be old, a man on the verge of the grave, and have all your thoughts fixed on a young creature like yourself!—to see life fading—but a few hours to live—and the hell of knowing she loves, and may become another’s! Henriette!” and he raised himself painfully, and grasped one of her hands, “swear to me that you never will marry that man!—swear it!”

“No,” she answered firmly, “I cannot. It may never be; he may be gone for ever; but I

cannot bind myself to the dead. Yours, I have been faithfully, under oppression, and sorrow. I forgive all! freely. I now recognize only prayer and peace in my heart towards you—but the grave looses all!”

“Then,” he uttered in deep agony, “May every woe be yours and his, if you ever marry! may—”

“Hush!” she cried solemnly. “Those curses cannot light on me! Oh! reflect; they will go before, and await you at Heaven’s gate!”

“You shall have wealth,—all! everything I possess, only swear that to me!—only for him—only for him; for you may never love another, and if you were, I should not know it!”

“Let us speak of other things!” she said, in a subdued tone: “The hereafter on earth should not trouble you now!”

“Think of a dying man’s rejected prayer by you, Henriette.”

She seemed composed and silent.

“Think of the agonies I endure; promise me that, and I shall die in peace.”

“I will promise you peace and pardon,” she

uttered, dropping on her knees and raising her hands, "If you will repent!"

"Repent," he cried, wildly; "whilst you are his, already in thought! Repent, and dying like a coward—give you up? No. I will raise my last voice in denunciations against it!" Alarmed by the cry which was forced from him, the attendants rushed in, and the grim messenger passed in, too, in their wake, and laid his hand upon him.

"I leave you a beggar!" he cried: "a beggar! a ——." The voice ceased: another grasp stayed his arm: a cold hand was on his lip: all was still.

A hand took her's, and the sheet was drawn over the distorted face.

"Come," said a mild tone, "this is no place for you, poor young creature," and the good-hearted doctor led the widow from that chamber.

Weeks passed over, and all was still in that hotel; it had passed into other hands. On opening the will, it was found that he had spoken truly in his last hours. So far as he could, he had left her a beggar. Everything had been left her on the sole condition that

she should never marry again. But still there was a marriage settlement which was not considerable—perhaps because there had been no one to interest themselves on that occasion.

A week after the funeral, she quitted the hotel, and repaired to apartments with Henri, until her affairs were settled. She had positively refused to take up her residence with her aunt. Henri, in her presence, forbore to wear a face of rejoicing, but it would have been an act of more than mortal strength, on his part, to aver that he was sorry for the General's death.

CHAPTER XX.

HENRIETTE'S stay in Paris was only as long as necessity required it. Her aunt was exceedingly indignant at her resolution to return to Des Ormes. Her hotel was open to her. A handsome young widow would give her *éclat*. But all was in vain: in the certainty of a complete rupture with the Comtesse, she quitted once more for the peace and quiet of Des Ormes, where kind hearts and open arms awaited her.

One morning, shortly after her return, she found Paula in tears, listening to her father. He looked round on the entrance of his elder child, but did not break the thread of his discourse.

“Heaven knows, Paula, my child, were it for your happiness I would gladly see you here, ever have you near me; but you are miserable; day by day you become more silent and sad.”

“And do you think, papa, that I should be happy as a wife—as Mr. Bruton’s wife—away from all?”

“Yes, Paula, away from all! You have said the truth; here you never can be content; there are too many sad memories; your rejection of Edgar Andriot; all is painful for you here.”

“Has Edgar proposed again for Paula?” asked her sister, and, despite her self-controul, her voice trembled.

Paula looked up fixedly at her.

“No,” answered her father; “but she has rejected him; and where can she find a kinder, better man than Bruton? He may seem stern, but I never, till of late, knew half his goodness of heart.”

“He has been very kind,” uttered Paula, with an effort. “But pray do not urge me to marry him; let me remain here—die here; I am too wretched to dream of marriage.”

“It shall be as you wish, dear child,” said the Baron affectionately: “only I feel assured, in absence you would find happiness.”

“I shall *never* know that!” she sighed.

“Don’t urge her, father,” asked Henriette gently; “leave all to time: that proves us best..”

Henriette held in her hand a letter. She had come with the intention of showing it to her father; on second thoughts she deemed it best to seek Père Andriot, and make him her messenger; first, towards her mother, who was almost invisible, except to him: the presence of all the others was pain to her. She loved them with a sincere affection, but shame rose uppermost; she was indeed suffering most keenly for her early error.

Henriette walked on towards the priest's house. It was a lovely morning—one to bring calm to any heart. The fields looked so gay, the blossoms so sweet, the birds so blithe, more especially the sweet uprising lark, which carries so many of our wondering thoughts upwards with it; "Oh!" thought she, "if there be a cruel sin, one more than another, when we make the free slaves, it is when one of these is compelled to flutter its little life away in a prison house, with a tuft of grass, in mockery of the wide heath, where it was reared." And she walked on in thought. She found Père Andriot at home, and a smile, kind as ever, to welcome her. Still there appeared something of embarrassment in his manner; he commenced a sentence, which he as speedily terminated.

The subject of her visit was, a letter she had that morning received from Howard, informing her of the death of his father, and his intended return shortly to France. Its ending was :

“ And now, my dearest sister, let me leave it to your gentle love to make our mother happy : tell her I wish it : if your prayers fail, tell her I implore it, both for her own sake and the happiness of your good, worthy father ; and lastly, that by that union, I may possibly remove the barrier to my own happiness with Clara Lennox— for much cause of discomfort in that marriage will be removed. I hear she is ill, and hope, oh ! so sincerely, that that illness may soften her father’s resolution.”

“ Armed with this, *mon père*,” said Henriette, “ you can implore my mother, as a sacred duty now, to Howard, to all of us, to unite herself to my father. Oh, that will be indeed a happy day for me.”

The *bon père* readily promised to see Madame de Rouvray at once, and walked home with Henriette for that purpose. She left him at the gate of the chateau, and turned off into the grounds to await the result. She was once again in the elm walk, and yet a coldness came

over her whenever she passed the spot where de Brissac shot himself. Half an hour elapsed, and still she walked there—but not alone.

“ I came,” said Edgar Andriot, “ to see you once more, and know my fate, Henriette. I was on the point of leaving for Algiers, when I heard of your freedom from those bonds which ought never to have bound you. I obtained a month’s leave to seek you, else I should not even have seen my poor uncle: I could not have revisited this spot. And now, dear Henriette, tell me, though I mistook your heart once, I have not now, have I ?”

Her hand was on his arm, and they stood still.

“ I will not deceive you, Edgar,” she gently, and sadly said; “ I did, I *do* love you.” And then she told him all her young hopes, how she had checked them, how she had sought to forget him, in the strong resolution of a woman’s heart, and how the General’s injustice made her self-sacrifice a keen regret. When all this was said, she paused awhile, and continued—“ Now, Edgar, it but remains for me to conclude, but in sadness. I fear Paula still loves you, and with that

fear, I never can become yours. Were she married, it might be different ; but know this, that the heart which has loved you through so much bitterness, and never changed, never will become another's. Go where you will, where you may, I shall ever love you."

Much he said to induce her to alter her determination. He spoke of his having first loved her, and Paula's assurance that she did not return it, making him turn towards the one, who undisguisedly avowed her's, mistaking his words, as applied to herself. He spoke too, of his once wavering heart, till taught to know itself ; and that a brother's affection was all he ever could give Paula.

All, however, was said in vain, and in sadness. Those two stepped out into the sunshine from beneath the elms. And another remained behind, creeping into the dark shade of her own heart, crushed and withered. Paula had heard all, and sat down on the spot where her lover fell ; and if tears of bitterness might wash away blood, surely her's did. She rose, if not happier, yet resolved and resigned ; and when next morning she placed her hand in Bruton's, and asked him to take her away to England, he

knew not that she had learnt that in this world there are many bitter sacrifices we make to insure the happiness of others. Those are not the only emigrants in this existence who quit their native soil too: too often the heart casts forth its affections on the dark waters of despair, exiles and mourners, to give up their place to stranger and uncongenial tenants who, for gold, have purchased that land blighted by bitterest tears!

A year passed away; and Paula wrote from England to wish her sister joy and happiness, which she had so well deserved, and had so hardly earned. She wrote calmly; but there was no sunshine of the heart there; the paper should have mourned in mockery of the words of joy; for as she prayed for it, her eyes baptized the prayer in tears.

The little village church looked so gay, and the children of the village strewed the path with flowers. Père Andriot was too happy even to remember that day when his bride was to have been so escorted; for Henriette, his own loved Henriette, a blushing happy bride, entered it with his nephew Edgar, having been previously married by a Protestant clergyman.

They were accompanied by the Baron de Rouvray, and the wife who had again sealed her love to him, in ties none might dispute; and few would have known that once spirit-broken woman, in the lady so calm, and serene, entering there. She knew there was pardon for error, in repentance; and in the love she now might look upon without shame, bore with patience the separation from her first-born, whose presence would have pained the one she was bound to love—her husband. Howard had promised she should visit him ere long, and that reconciled her to his unavoidable absence from Des Ormes. Henri, too, and all were there happy but Paula and Howard. She was in England; he in Italy, with Clara Lennox, Countess of Courtown. In the background were sister Louise, Manette, and the many who loved those two—Henriette and Edgar. Poor Manette! she tried to laugh, but her tears, half sorrow, half rejoicing, were a poor imitation of either.

“I wish, *mon enfant*,” she said, when they were again alone in Henriette’s quiet chamber, “that you were not going so far from us; Algiers is quite another world. But then you have so kind a husband now.”

“Yes, Manette, ma nourrice chérie ; but then it is only for a year, and I must learn to be a soldier’s bride, and not stand in the path of his advancement. In a year, we shall, I trust, all meet here again.”

“I will pray for it, ma fillette, for you have been as a child to me.” The arms were round her, and the bride of an hour wept, but not in sadness—in gratitude—for almost more than a mother’s love came from that humble heart. And when she departed, the bark which bore her was wafted by the blessings of father, mother—of all whom she had made so blessed by her persevering goodness through many trials.

THE END.

